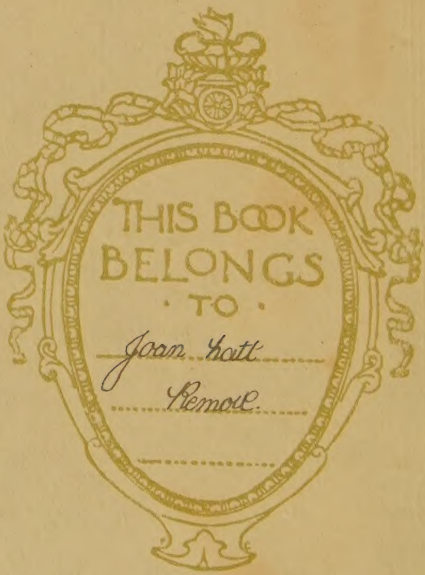
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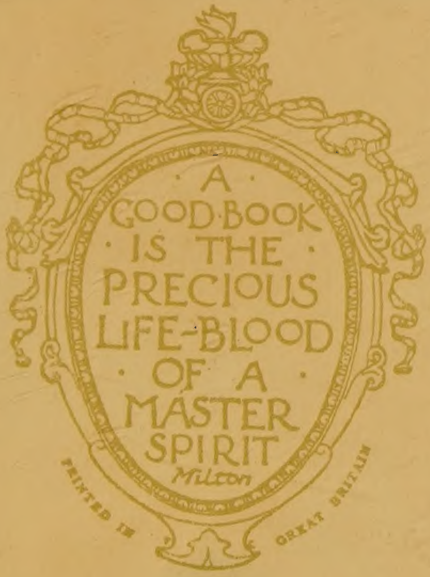
A GOOD BOOK IS THE PRECIOUS LIFE-BLOOD OF A MASTER SPIRIT
Milton
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

The KING'S TREASURIES
OF LITERATURE

GENERAL EDITOR
SIR A·T· QUILLER COUCH

THE "TABARD" INN · SOUTHWARK ·
FROM AN OLD ENGRAVING

H.C.

NEW YORK E·P·DUTTON AND COMPANY

THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS

BEING CHAUCERS CANTERBURY TALES RETOLD FOR CHILDREN

BY M. STURT M.A.
AND
E. C. OAKDEN M.A.

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INTRODUCTION

GEOFFREY CHAUCER lived more than five hundred years ago, when Edward III. waged war in France, and the peasants rebelled in England against his grandson, Richard II. Yet for all this, England was then "Merrie England." Her trade prospered, men laughed and sang and delighted in tales, in art, and in out-door life.

Chaucer was not a poet who lived apart from his fellows, but one who dealt constantly with men and affairs, and loved his fellow-men. He was an important person in his time. He began life as a page boy at Court, where he saw great ladies and gallant courtiers, and heard music and took part in pageants and processions. He fought for the king in France and was taken prisoner by the enemy; but the king paid sixteen pounds for his ransom and he returned to England. He went to France again and to Italy as ambassador on the king's business. Thus he met famous men in foreign lands and saw the beautiful land of Italy, where in his day lived two Italian poets whose names are as famous as Chaucer's own, one of whom he makes his Clerk mention—Petrarch of Padua. He saw, too, the fine buildings and paintings which Italian artists were making, whose fame has spread abroad throughout the world. Chaucer loved all this colour and beauty,

and carried it in his mind, so that when he again came to London he remembered it and wrote of it.

He was a member of Parliament, and a civil servant too, whose work it was to collect the customs. He had to make long records of his accounts all day; but at night returned with joy to his house above the Aldgate in the walls of London. There he pored over his books, and "dumb as any stone," he tells us, he read, and dreamed, and wrote.

But when spring came, no more indoors for him! Away he went, out to the fields, which then came to the edge of the Thames and to the very walls of the city. There in the bright sunshine he sought his favourite flower, the daisy, and met men in the open roads and lanes, and because he liked men and respected them, they talked to him very freely of their lives and doings. Often in April he saw motley companies of men and women riding out of the stuffy narrow streets of the town, away along country roads by hedgerow and meadow, to some distant shrine, where they would pray to the saints for prosperity and help.

Chaucer one day went with such a company, and he has left us his record of it. *The Canterbury Tales* describe better than any history book the people of Chaucer's time. You will find that in their dress and manners they are often strangely different from ourselves; but in much we are very like to them. All kinds and conditions of men are there, good and bad. There is love for honour and beauty, laughter

CHAUCER

(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

(The Ellesmere MS. was made by a scribe after Chaucer's death. The pictures in the MS. are in beautiful colours.)

for a jest, impatience for a dreary tale, ridicule for a worn-out one, good-fellowship and joy in the open air, loose tongues and travellers' stories, drinking by the way, and mishaps by the road. Travelling was difficult, for the roads were full of holes and very muddy and dirty, and a man must either walk or go on horseback. Some of the party had bad horses and some were anything but expert riders, so that it took four days to ride the fifty-six miles from London to Canterbury. The nights were spent at inns where many shared one room, and beds were not as clean as they might have been. But the pilgrims made a happy party, as you will see, for they beguiled the way with stories. Chaucer tells these stories in his account of his pilgrimage. He never completed the account, however, but left some gaps in the story. The general plan of the work is clear enough, and in this little book the gaps have been bridged in a manner consistent with Chaucer's account of the journey.

Chaucer's language is different from ours of to-day, and although easy to read when one is used to it, is difficult at first. Therefore these tales are retold in this little book in our present-day language and in prose instead of verse. They lose much of Chaucer's vivacity and spirit by this translation, but try and read the originals for yourself one day, and learn to love one who has been dear for his humanity, kindliness and humour to poets and ordinary folk alike, from 1370 to now.

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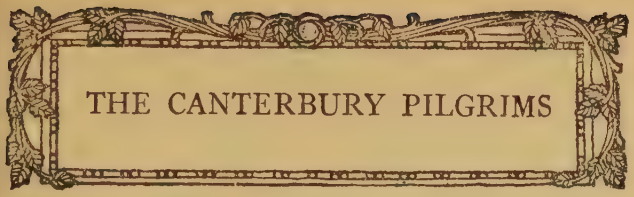


THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS

PROLOGUE

WHEN April comes, and with her gentle showers has banished the dreary month of March, when in every copse and valley the young trees bud and flowers show their heads, when birds make melody in the fresh morning time, then men's hearts long for the wide air and joys of the open roads. It is the time for pilgrims. Forth they ride through wood and lane, by stream and meadow, to seek the shrines of saints and worship God in distant fanes. Many journey to Canterbury to do honour to the tomb of the great St. Thomas and to enjoy the fields and sunshine along the roads of Kent. As they go they make merry their journey with songs, tales, and joking.

It chanced, as it was also my intention to ride thither, that I lay one night at the Tabard Inn, in Southwark, ready to start on my way next morning. Towards nightfall a company of twenty-nine other pilgrims arrived. They had met by chance and were people of all sorts and kinds. The inn is large with roomy apartments and good fare, so that all the guests were soon in friendly mood, and I talked with them all.

There was a *Knight* and his son a *Squire*, not yet entered into the full glory of knighthood, but yet experienced in war—for he had fought in Flanders and in Picardy. He was about twenty years of age, with fair curly hair so neatly dressed that you would have said it had been waxed. He could make songs and poetry, draw, write and dance. All day he sang or played his flute. Yet for all his grace and cleverness he was lowly, and carved at table for his father. His tunic matched his gaiety of heart, for it was embroidered all over, as full of red and white flowers as is a meadow.

With the Knight and Squire was their servant, a *Yeoman Forester*. He was dressed in hood and cloak of green, with a green baldrick for his horn. His sheaf was full of arrows feathered with gay peacock plumes, and in addition he carried a sword and buckler and a sharp dagger. He was a fine figure, with skin browned by life in the woods. He was skilled too, knowing all the secrets of woodcraft.

A *Prioress* was of the company. She spoke in soft coy tones, and smiled gently on all; but Madame Eglantine was chiefly attractive because of her charming manners. No morsel ever fell from her lips, neither did she dip her fingers too deeply in the sauce, nor drop her meat as her dainty fingers carried it from her plate to her mouth. She seemed ever at pains to show her courtly behaviour, and may have kept a small school, for she spoke French (as they speak it in London, however, not as they speak it in Paris).

She had brought her small dogs with her and fed them carefully on best wheaten bread and roasted meat. If anyone smote one of them Madame Eglantine wept bitterly, for she was full of tenderness and pity, and had been known to cry if a mouse were caught in a trap. With her were a nun, and her three priests.

As you would expect, many other members of the Church were among our company. The *Monk* was a manly fellow, who loved hunting and good living. Many a horse he had in his stables, and many greyhounds for hunting the hare. A fat swan was his favourite dish. His looks told of his ample fare, for he was fat and rosy, and rode merrily along with his bridle bells jingling clearly in the wind. "Some say that hunters can't be holy men," he said, "but I can't agree with those that would make monks madden themselves with study and tire themselves with labour. What good comes of it all?" "What good indeed?" said I.

The *Friar*, Hubert, was a gay fellow too. I daresay that in all the Four Orders of Friars you would not find a more pleasing talker—especially in matters of love. He sang lustily, played the harp, and kept us merry with his jesting.

Not so the *Clerk* from Oxford. He was a serious student. For many years he had devoted himself to logic and philosophy, yet little gold had got thereby! His horse was lean as a rake, and he himself was by no means fat. His threadbare cloak hung limply on his shoulders. Had he been more worldly-minded,

he might have gained a rich benefice; but all his treasure was in the twenty red and black books at his bedside, where he found the rich thought of Aristotle — more satisfying to the Clerk than gold, or robes or sweet music. All the money he was given he spent on books, praying eagerly for the souls of them that helped him to buy more. He spoke but little. His speech then was quick and packed with thought, and he loved best to talk of moral virtue. Glad he was to learn, and glad to teach.

One man among the company was terrible to look upon. His face was fiery red with black brows and scabbed skin. He had crowned himself with a great garland. It was no wonder that even children were afraid of him. This man, I learned, was a *Summoner*, who brought up offenders before the Church courts.

His friend was the *Pardoner*—just arrived from the court of Rome with his wallet packed full of pardons and relics. You shall hear what he did with these later. He had long straight oily yellow hair, spread thinly around his shoulders. He had packed his hood in his wallet, for it seemed more festive to him to ride bare-headed. His eyes shone like a hare's. He had no beard, and his small, piping, goat-like voice made him seem very youthful.

He was said to be a very successful Pardoner; for he could not only read and sing delightfully (especially when asking for the offertory), but his manner was so persuasive that in one day he could win more silver than the parson earned in two or

three months. A fine Pardoner, this! No wonder he sang so merrily and loud!

A poor *Parish Priest* was there also. He was too occupied in holy works, in teaching and diligently tending the sick to have time to hunt for high positions in London. To him, all that mattered was that his parishioners should know the true Gospel, and never, for rain, thunder, sickness, nor danger did he fail to visit his people, scattered as they were over the wide country-side. Often he gave them of his own poor substance, for he was the true shepherd who gives all for his sheep. A better priest, I warrant, could nowhere be found. He taught Christ's lore, but first he followed it himself that his followers might find an example in him, and learn by his practices, as well as by his words.

This Priest had brought his brother, a strong good-hearted *Ploughman*. He too was a true Christian. Many a time had he dug and threshed for a poor widow to help her pay her rent, and would take no reward for it. He wore a loose tabard, and rode on a mare.

The workers from the town included a *Weaver*, a *Carpenter*, a *Haberdasher*, a *Dyer*, and an *Upholsterer*. All prosperous men they were, as indeed you could tell from the silver trappings on their pouches and knives, and fit to be aldermen of their boroughs. Their wives would have liked it, I know! These men had brought their *Cook* with them.

Some of the pilgrims had come from far afield.

The Pardoner's home was in Roncivale, while the *Shipman* hailed from Dartmouth. There lay his little barque, "The Magdalene." His dagger hung on his lanyard and he rode unsteadily, in sailor fashion, on a nag.

From Bath we had a buxom *Wife*—a champion cloth-weaver. I daresay her Sunday head-dress weighed ten pounds. Even her riding-hat was as broad as a shield. Her stockings were scarlet. Her shoes were cut in the latest fashion and had sharp spurs attached. She had travelled far, even to Jerusalem, and gossipped amusingly of herself and her numerous adventures.

The *Reeve* of the company came from Baldeswelle in Norfolk.

A *Miller*, a *Steward*, a *Doctor*, a solemn *Merchant*, a *Franklin* and myself completed the company. The Doctor was one of the best of his profession. He knew exactly when to make his images of wax, and under what moon he should gather his herbs. He was very learned; I could not tell you of all the authors he had read. He was rich too, for the Black Death had brought him no little gain.

Now let me tell what happened at the inn.

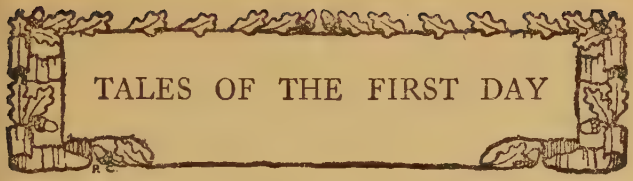
At supper we made a merry party, for the wine was strong, and Harry Bailey, our host, a jovial soul. Seeing us in good humour, he addressed us thus: "My friends, you are welcome here. To-morrow you depart; but surely it will be very dull if you ride silent and morose. I have a plan to keep

you merry all the way. What say you, shall I tell it?" We held up our hands at once to vote that he should tell on. "This is my plan, then. As you journey to Canterbury every one of you shall tell a tale, and as you return every one shall tell another tale. He who tells the best shall be given a supper at the expense of the rest of us—here at this inn, when we come back. What say you? And indeed, to make you the jollier, I myself will go with you, to be your guide and governor!" We heartily agreed, begged him to be the judge of the tales, and promised to obey him in all things. So with laughter and jollity we went to bed betimes to rise early on the morrow.

Our host was as good as his word, and at day-break he roused us all and gathered us together. Off we rode at a gentle pace, with the Miller playing his bagpipes and the Summoner singing a loud bass to the Pardoner's tenor. At St. Thomas's watering-place our host stopped and called out, "Let's see now if you agree to last night's plan! Before we go further, come, draw lots who shall tell the first tale. Come hither Sir Knight, my Lady-Prioress, and you, you modest Clerk." He held out to them grasses of different lengths, hiding the ends in his hands so that they could not see which was the longest; and the Knight drew the longest grass, and so had to begin the game. He was a worthy man, this Knight, and loved truth and honour, freedom and courtesy. Although he had won great praise in many foreign wars, he was gentle and modest as a maid, perfect in manners and

goodness. His clothes might have deceived you as to his rank. His habergeoun was bespattered with the mud of his latest journey, and his gipoun was but of fustian, yet his horse was a fine one. As you would expect, his tale was of chivalry and knighthood.

THE KNIGHT



THE KNIGHT'S TALE OF PALAMON AND ARCITE

Long ago, as old stories say, there was a great duke named Theseus, renowned in fight and perfect in all chivalry. One day, as he was returning from one of his most glorious battles, a great company of women met him, weeping and wringing their hands in grief. They besought Theseus that he would help them. "We are from Thebes," they said, "and in the days of our prosperity were ladies of rank; but alas, Creon, our foe, has sacked our city, slain our husbands and sons, and now denies us even the right to bury our dead."

Theseus was moved to anger at their story, and swore that he would punish Creon. Without more ado, he turned his horse and led his men to Thebes. There he killed Creon and his followers, and the mournful ladies were able to wash the bodies of their lords and give them honourable burial. Now it chanced that among those whom Theseus fought were two young knights, Palamon and Arcite. They were sorely wounded in the fight and had been left for dead; but after the battle they were

discovered wounded, and taken back to Athens as Theseus' prisoners.

For many a day they were shut up in a room in a high tower overlooking Theseus' garden. Very woeful were they, until one May morning Palamon looked through his barred window and saw a lovely maid walking in the garden below. It was early morning, with the dew still on the flowers and the first beams of the sun glistening on all things. The maid was as fair as the flowers that she gathered to make her garland. Her hair was golden and hung in a long plait, and the blossoms she gathered for her garland were red and white. For very joy she sang so sweet a song that Palamon beholding her loved her with all his heart, yet thought she was too beautiful to be a maid of earth. He looked long, and sighed, "O goddess, if thou wilt but help me to be free, I will be always thy trusty servant." Hearing him thus speak, Arcite also looked out, and he too at once loved the wondrous beauty of the maid. "May I die unless I have her," he said, and sighed too. At this Palamon was angry. "Traitor," he said, "do you now break the vow we made each other long ago—never to betray each other, and never to cross each other in love? I saw and loved the maid first. She must be *mine*."

"No," answered Arcite. "You thought she was a goddess; I loved her first as a woman. She must be *mine*." So they fell to quarrelling loudly and cruelly. At last Arcite said, "We waste our time to

quarrel thus. Neither of us can ever win her. Poor prisoners we are, and doomed to die here without a thought from happier men. Some rich lord will carry her away. Ours she cannot be." And they were very sad.

Now it chanced that a certain duke who was a friend of Arcite came to visit Theseus, and persuaded him to set young Arcite free. Theseus did so, but only on condition that Arcite should leave Athens for ever. "If from this time forth you are found in this land," he said, "your head will be forfeit." So Arcite went to Thebes, very heavy-hearted, because although he was now free, he might never more see the maid of the garden. Palamon's case was equally hard, for although he might see his beloved, never might he speak to her nor woo her, for he must remain a poor neglected prisoner, high up in the castle tower. Now tell me, you lovers, if you can, whose lot was the worse? Is it better to be free and never see one's lady, or to be a prisoner and see her every day?—Judge for yourselves. I must go on with my story.

Arcite lived in Thebes, so sorrowfully that he fell a-weeping whenever music was played, and soon grief had so changed his countenance that no man could have recognised him. At last he could bear this state no longer, but made up his mind to go to Athens, and there seek his lady. He came therefore to the palace of Theseus and hired himself as a servant. He was strong and able to draw water

and hew wood. In course of time he was made a chamberlain, and at length, since he was always mannerly and courteous and obedient, Theseus promoted him, and he became a squire and one of his best beloved followers.

Meanwhile Palamon languished in prison, till, made desperate by despair, he one night drugged his jailer and escaped. When day came he sought refuge in a wood, intending to wait there for the dark to cover his escape. As Fortune willed it, that very morning, Arcite (now calling himself Philostratus) rode out into the wood to enjoy the fresh sweet air of the May morning, and dismounted from his horse near the very bush where Palamon lay hid. There he paced up and down, restless, and spoke aloud to himself of all his sorrows. "I am royally born," he said, "yet I must pretend to serve Theseus, my mortal enemy. Palamon my brother is a captive. Unhappy are we both—better to die of love for my lady than live this miserable life." At this mention of his love, Palamon's heart was stirred to wrath, and forth he rushed from his hiding-place. "Traitor Arcite," he cried, "do you still dare to love my lady? Will you still break our vow of fealty, one to the other? Now you have deceived Theseus! But beware! I am Palamon! You must give up your love or die!" Saying this he rushed at Arcite. As it happened Arcite was armed, and drew his sword, but seeing that Palamon had no weapon, he stayed his hand and said, "If you will do combat for your

love, wait here till to-morrow. I cannot fight you unarmed as you are. At dawn I will bring you armour, and a sword, and food. Then let the best warrior have the fair lady of the garden!" And so they parted.

Arcite kept his word and brought the armour at daybreak. As soon as it was light those two armed themselves in the wood, and fell on each other like a lion and a tiger when they wage mortal combat in the thick forest. Neither shrank himself nor spared his adversary. Their shields were dinted, sparks flew from their helmets, and down their breastplates many a stream of blood flowed.

Amid the din of their blows on the armour and the fury of combat, they did not hear the hunting horn nor the baying of the hounds, and so, before they knew it, Theseus and all his court were around them, and had called on them to cease their clamour and explain why they strove so fiercely together. They dropped their weapons in amazement, and saw that with Theseus were his queen, and the lady for whose love they fought, Emily the Fair, the niece of Theseus. She was dressed in green, as befitted a huntress on so bright a morning. Palamon spoke at once. "Show us no mercy, Lord Theseus. Better it is that we should both die, for well have we deserved death. I, Palamon, am your captive, escaped from prison but yesterday, and this man here is Arcite, who for many years has deceived you. This our quarrel is for the love of Emily, the bright maid at

your side. Slay us both, and let our sorrow have an end." Theseus was wroth, and would indeed have slain them, but the queen and Emily pleaded so well for their lives that the duke relented. "You are foolish, both of you," he said; "but lovers are ever thus. This is my judgment. For fifty weeks you shall be free, and then shall you appear, each with a hundred knights, to do battle for Emily in a tournament. Whoso wins that day shall have her for his bride." Palamon and Arcite leapt up with joy at this; and all the court praised Theseus for his chivalrous behaviour and knightly courtesy.

Those fifty weeks were busy times in Athens. The lists prepared for the tournament were the most wonderful ever seen. The walls were circular and a mile round. At the east and west ends were marble gateways over which were temples. On the east gate was a temple to Venus, the Goddess of Love, and on the west gate a temple to Mars, God of War. On the north side was a temple in honour of Diana, the Goddess of Maidens. Every man in the kingdom who could carve or paint or build had been summoned to work on these lists and make them beautiful. I wish I could describe to you all their magnificence. On the walls of the temple of Venus were painted the stories of the great lovers of fable and history. The statue of the goddess herself seemed to float in a grass-green sea, and on her head she wore a garland of roses. Mars' temple was dark and gloomy, with pictures of battle and murder on the walls. The

statue of Mars himself was guarded by a wolf of stone. In Diana's temple was the statue of the goddess riding upon a hart, with small hounds about her feet. Her dress was green and she carried a bow and quiver of arrows. A waxing moon, her symbol, was painted below her statue.

On the Sunday appointed for their meeting, Arcite and Palamon entered Athens with their companies. Bold knights and noble princes were assembled from every land to do battle in honour of so fair a maid. With Palamon came the great King of Thrace, wearing a crown of gold set with rubies and diamonds. His armour was covered with a coal-black bear-skin, and he was carried in a chair of gold.

The other knights were all famous and goodly to look upon. Each was armed according to his liking, with mace or spear, breastplate and shield. Some had greaves, some a Prussian shield; no fashion was too old or too new to be seen there.

With Arcite came the great King of India, whose horse was decked with cloth of gold, while he himself had coat-armour studded with pearls, a saddle of beaten gold, and a mantle of sparkling rubies. On his head was a green wreath of laurel, and he carried a tame white eagle on his hand. Many a tame lion and leopard ran about his horse's feet. With him came many a goodly knight equipped for the fray.

The entertainment was princely. I cannot tell you of the feasts, and the minstrelsy, nor of the great gifts to high and low; neither can I describe to you

the fairness of the ladies and their graceful dancing; nor the hounds that lay upon the floor, and the hawks who perched aloft. It was all wondrous indeed. Such feasting and splendour had ne'er been known before.

At last the great day of the tournament came. At dawn Palamon arose and went to sacrifice to Venus in her temple, and ask her help. "I care not, goddess, whether in fight I win the laurels," he said. "For me it is enough if she whom I love, the lady Emily, look on me kindly and grant me her love. Help me, great goddess, help me. Never shalt thou have a truer servant than I." Great was his joy when after some delay the statue of Venus shook, for by this sign Palamon understood that his prayer would be answered.

With the uprising of the sun, Emily herself also arose, bathed herself in clear cool water, and went to ask Diana's help. "I would rather be a maid all my life, and run and leap in the fields and woods," she said, "but if the gods will that I be given to one of these knights who desire me, O grant that I be given to him who loves me most!" Thereat a marvellous thing happened; for one of the two fires on the altar suddenly died down, but quickly leaped up in flame again, while the other as suddenly died down and drops of blood oozed from the dying embers. The statue of Diana shook and rattled the arrows in its quiver, while the goddess herself appeared. "It is the will of the gods you marry

one of these men," she said, "but I may not as yet declare which." And so she vanished.

"I am in thy hands, Diana!" cried Emily. "Grant me at least thy protection."

An hour later Arcite went to the temple of the terrible God of War. "O Mars," he prayed, "grant me victory in the fight this day, and evermore I will serve thee." At this the rings of the temple doors clanged, the very walls rang, while the fire on the altar blazed bright in the gloom. From the earth rose a sweet savour. The statue of Mars itself shook, and murmured "Victory." The walls and armour re-echoed, "Victory."

Arcite rose up from his prayer glad and confident, and went to prepare for the fight.

Never was such excitement before. On every hand was noise of bolting of armour, buckling of helms, bridling of horses, sounding of trumpets, pawing of steeds; rushing here to see a fine prince and his retinue, rushing there to see a fine new banner and shield; and over all the bright sun of a fresh May morning. Some were sure Arcite would win, some favoured Palamon, but whatever the event of the day, all knew that ere the sun set many a deed of valour would be done, and many a gallant knight show his prowess.

At an early hour Theseus himself in all his royal robes appeared at his palace window, and all the folk hastened thither to see him and hear his will. The royal herald mounted a high scaffold. "Ho!

Ho!" he cried. "Hear the will of Theseus the great duke! For inasmuch as it were destructive to gentle blood to fight a mortal battle this day, he that shall be overcome shall not be slain, but shall be brought to the stakes which are at either end of the lists. There, brought by force, shall he abide, nor take any further part in fighting. If and when the chieftain on either side be taken, then shall we declare the tourney over and award the prize. Go forth, good people, go forth! This is my lord's will!" Loud were the people's cheers, and at once the processions began. Theseus with his queen and Emily and all his royal court led the way. Palamon followed with his hundred knights in battle array, with white plumes and banners waving in the wind. Next came Arcite with his knights under red pennons. Oh! it was a sight to gladden the heart of a man! Such colour, such workmanship in arms, such skill in riding, such knightly bearing, and to crown all, such beauty!

And now the companies enter the lists and are lined up two deep, facing one another. The heralds' trumpets sound, the names of the combatants are read and the gates closed.

Once more the trumpets blare, the heralds call "To your places, knights," and the fight begins. The combatants rush together. Swords flash, spears are set in rest. Here one is borne from his horse, here another is pierced through the breast. Here a knight swings his mace and crashes through helm and bone. Nor armour nor skill can ward off such

mighty blows, and horses and their riders fall. One is taken captive to the stake. Another shares his fate. Thick rises the dust, loud rings the battle din, and on all sides fierce confusion reigns and cruel war.

Throughout the mêlée rage Palamon and Arcite; Arcite like a tiger that has lost her whelp, Palamon like a ravening lion athirst for blood. Through the long day they fight, until at last Palamon is set upon by Arcite and the Indian king at once, with twenty more knights to help them. Then, not all the great strength of his arm and sword can avail him, but, o'erborne by the weight of numbers, he is dragged, resisting still, to the shameful stake.

When Theseus saw this he stopped the fight.

"Ho—no more," he said. "All is done. Emily is the bride of Arcite of Thebes." Sad was Palamon, but Arcite, with helm unlaced, rode proudly on his courser towards Emily. All the trumpets sang loud of his victory. Thousands of voices acclaimed him. Mars had fulfilled his prophecy. What then could Venus be doing, for had she not promised success to Palamon?

A moment! My story is not ended. As Arcite rode thus joyously to claim his prize, it chanced that an adder suddenly started from the ground before the horse's feet. The charger reared and swerved, and Arcite was thrown against the pommel of his saddle with such violence that his breast-bone was broken, and he fell down in a swoon. He was carried quickly away; but all that night, while feasting and merry-

making reigned in the palace, poor Arcite lay dying. "Alas!" he cried. "Farewell to you, my lady, my love, my wife won by my prowess. Farewell to the world and merry company. I go where man must be alone and cold. Farewell again, my fairest Emily!" And so with his lady's name on his lips, he died.

Great was the mourning throughout Athens for so noble a warrior and so true a lover. His funeral pyre was heaped high with all sweet woods and spices. All famous Greeks came thither to play in his funeral games.

Men mourned for Arcite for many a long year. But at last their sorrow spent itself, — one day Palamon came again to the court of Theseus.

There, with gentle patient wooing, he won at length the hand of Emily, and gained thus his heart's desire and the reward of his true love of her.

They lived long in richness and health. Never was fairer wife than Emily; never was knight more faithful than Palamon. There I leave them. God bless them, and grant His grace and loving-kindness to this fair company. Amen.

* * * * *

When the Knight had finished his tale, the whole company, young and old, praised it. The Host was delighted; he burst out laughing. "The play goes finely," he cried. "Now we have started the ball rolling, who will tell the next tale? Will you, Sir

Monk, give us a worthy follower to the Knight?" Before the Monk had time to answer, the Miller interrupted. He was a broad, thick-set fellow with a red beard, a great wide mouth, and a wart on his nose. He wore a white coat and blue hood, and was armed with a sword and buckler. By this time he was so overcome by riding and drinking that he could hardly sit his horse, and what manners he possessed had left him. "I can tell a fine tale," he shouted, "a good match for the Knight's." The Host saw that he was in no fit state to tell a tale. "Good friend Robin, take thy turn," he said. "Let a better man than thee speak first." "Not I," said the Miller. "I tell my tale when I like, or leave the party." "Well," said the Host, "tell if thou must, but thou art making a fool of thyself."

"Now hearken!" began the Miller. "I begin my tale with a declaration. I am drunk. I know it, and I bid you excuse any mistakes I make for that very reason. It's the fault of Southwark ale, not mine, and my tale is about a carpenter and how a scholar deceived him." "Forbear!" cried Oswald the Reeve. "I am a carpenter. Beware how you tell your jibing tales of my craft." But the Miller could not be silenced and began his tale.

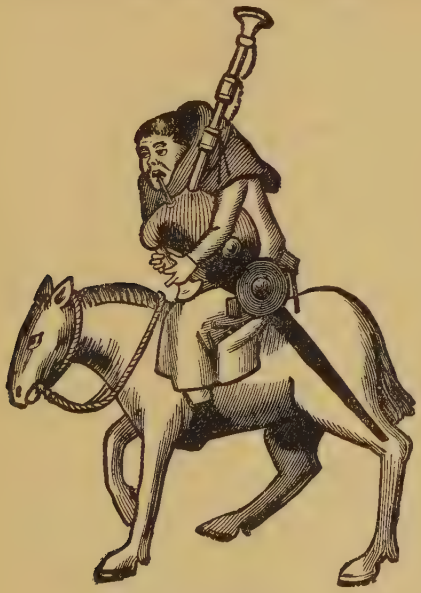
Kind reader, if you do not like the tale please excuse me and turn to another and harmless one. I am merely the chronicler of this journey and must tell the truth.

THE MILLER'S TALE OF A CARPENTER OUTWITTED

There was a rich carpenter who lived at Oxford and took in students to board with him. Among them was one named Nicholas, as proper a man as one could wish to see. He kept his room all strewed with sweet herbs. At his bed's head, neatly arranged on shelves, were his books and calculating pebbles, for he studied astrology and could foretell the weather. A red cloth covered his press and on the wall hung his little harp. He was a gay fellow and loved merry-making, yet looked as gentle and dainty as a maiden. The carpenter was an old man, and had just married a wife of eighteen, named Alisoun. She was as pretty a woman as you could find in the whole country-side. Dressed up in all her finery she was as gay as a bird. Her girdle was silk and her apron as white as snow. Her smock was white and broidered with black silk, and her brooch as large as the base of a shield. The ribbon of her cap matched her embroidery, and her eyebrows were black and arched. But the most tempting thing about her was the way she looked at one. A very primrose she was, on my faith, as fair as an apple tree in blossom. Nicholas loved her well enough, and others too; but her husband would let her go

nowhere but to church and never allowed her to take part in any festivities.

All went smoothly, however, till the time for the



THE MILLER
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

yearly plays came round, when the stories of Adam, Joseph and Herod, and many another Bible hero, are performed in the market-place. Such times are holidays for all. Everybody goes to the plays, and

all the young people take part in them. Alisoun longed to go, but she knew it was no good asking her tyrannical husband.

One day, while her husband was away at Osney, she told Nicholas of her desire, and cried to him because she was kept so strictly at home. Nicholas was sorry for her. "What is the good of being a scholar if I cannot outwit a carpenter?" he said. "I will find a way out." They made their plan between them and carried up into Nicholas's room enough food for two or three days. Neither that day nor the next did Nicholas come down to meals, until at last the carpenter began to get anxious. "Have you called Nicholas?" he said to his wife. "Why, yes!" she said. "I have sent my maid to knock and there is no answer." "Perhaps he is ill," answered the carpenter. "Life is very uncertain these days. Why, but yesterday I saw a corpse carried to the churchyard, and another last week. I do hope no harm has befallen the young man." Then he sent his man to see what he could do. The man knocked but got no answer. Then he noticed a hole in the bottom of the door by which the cat used to go in and out, and stooping down he looked through. Nicholas was sitting in a chair with his head back, staring at something. Down went the man and told what he had seen. "Alas!" said the carpenter, "he is certainly mad. This is what comes of his studies. I have heard tell of another astronomer who was so busy looking at the stars that he fell into a clay pit. I fear

something like that has happened to Nicholas. I will go and see about it." He took the servant with him, and together they lifted the door right off its hinges, and down it fell with a bang on the floor.

Nicholas never moved and seemed to hear nothing. "Dear me!" said the carpenter, "he is certainly mad." He went up and touched him; still Nicholas did not move. Then the carpenter began to utter a spell:

> "Christ and Benedict the saint,
> Keep us safe from elvés quaint,
> From witches and fairies of the night,
> Peter's sister, guard us quite."

As he finished Nicholas began to groan and to move about. "Ah, he is better," said the carpenter. "But what ails you now?" "It is a terrible thing that I have learnt!" said Nicholas. "Send away your man and I will tell you all as far as I may." So with many lamentations he began. "By my art I have learnt that the end of mankind is at hand. Once more there will be a flood such as there was in the days of Noah, and this flood will begin no later than the day after to-morrow." The carpenter began to wail. "Oh, what will become of us! Must we all drown? Alas, alas!" "There is one way to be saved," said the scholar, "which I will tell you as it was revealed to me. Get a tub and hang it from the rafters in the barn, then put in food and drink for a day. That will be enough, for the flood will be short. Break open the gable at the end so that you can sail out, and wait there for the water." "But must I be

saved alone?" cried the carpenter. "What of my wife? What of my servants?" "Your wife I can save," answered the other, "and myself too; but your servants must perish — such is the will of heaven. Now go. Get three tubs, one for each of us, hang them well apart, and make the other preparations; but be sure of this:—not one word of what is coming must pass your lips to anyone save your wife. Such is heaven's decree."

Away went the carpenter to tell his wife, and she, though she was in the plot, feigned great fear and wept and wailed, till her husband went off to make his preparations. He bought three tubs and hung them up high from the rafters, put in each of them bread, meat, and ale, and even made three ladders to climb up by. Then on the day that Nicholas had named, before it was light, they all three climbed up to their tubs. Said Nicholas, "Have you a knife by you so that when this water comes you may cut your tub loose and float away?" "I have," said the carpenter. "Then from this time on we must keep absolute silence," said Nicholas.

By and by the carpenter, for all his fear, fell asleep. As soon as they heard him snoring Nicholas and Alisoun crept down and went to the fair.

In the market-place the waggons on which the plays are acted were already drawn up. The actors were there in all their finery. There was Abraham with his rich robe, and Pilate and Herod appeared in their crowns and shining jewels, and roared out

their speeches to the delighted audience. The flames gushed out from "hell's mouth," and eerie-looking demons romped and capered, now on the stage, now among the spectators. The minstrels were there too. Never was such frivolity. Alisoun danced with Nicholas, and all the company said they were the best pair there.

At last, long after dusk, they went home. Just as they drew near the carpenter's house, Nicholas bethought him of a new dance. He was so merry that he whirled and capered to show off his steps to Alisoun, quite forgetful of the lighted torch he was carrying, until the flame blew aside in the wind and caught one of Alisoun's ribbons which began to burn. "Water, water!" cried the wife. "Water!" called Nicholas, and others near, thinking that a thatch must be afire, called loudly, "Water, water!"

The din was so loud that it waked the carpenter in his tub, where he had slumbered heavily the whole day through. Hearing the shout he thought the flood had come at last. With a cry of fear, he quickly took out his knife and cut through the cords. Down fell the tub to the floor, with such a crash that the poor old man broke his arm and fainted.

The neighbours all gathered to see what had happened, but the carpenter got no sympathy. "He is mad!" said Nicholas and Alisoun; "mad with fear of Noah's flood!" The neighbours laughed as they looked at the tubs. "What a stupid old man!" they said. "He must be mad indeed!"

So for all his care the carpenter got a broken arm, and Nicholas and Alisoun had a jolly day at the plays.

* * * * *

This tale of Nicholas and the carpenter made us all laugh, except Oswald the Reeve. He was annoyed, of course, since a carpenter was befooled in the Miller's story. He looked sourly on us now, with his spare pinched face. His hair was shaved close and his legs were long and thin. All his dress was poor, even his sword was rusty, and generally he rode the hindermost of our party. Yet for all his uncouthness he kept his master's property well, although some said the tenants dreaded him as the plague. He had told me that his house was built fairly upon a wide heath, yet shaded with green trees.

"If I liked," he said, "I could tell a tale against your craft, and show how a miller was tricked and fared worse than your carpenter. But I am old, and my term of life is nearly done. Quarrelling and scorn befit not white hairs, yet little is left us old men but envy, malice, and all uncharitableness."

At that Harry Bailey interrupted him. "Why all this grumbling and sermoning?" he said in his lordliest tones. "What has a reeve to do with texts? Tell your tale, my man, and don't waste time. Look, there is Deptford, and half our morning's gone! Yonder is Greenwich! Come, we have no time to listen to your moralising. Begin!"

"Forgive me then," said Oswald, "if I tell you a tale to cap the Miller's. Such drunken scoundrels deserve quittance. Here is my story."

THE REEVE'S TALE OF THE MILLER OF TRUMPINGTON

At Trumpington, a hamlet not far from Cambridge, there runs a brook; over it is a bridge. On this brook there stands a mill, and there a miller had his dwelling many a year. He was proud as a peacock, handy with the pipes, a good man at fishing and at wrestling or in an archery match. He always went armed; at his side a claymore—and sharp he kept the blade—a poignard in his pouch and a dirk in his stocking. It would be a brave man that dare touch him. In looks he had a round face and a snub nose, and his head was as bald as an ape's. He was a swaggerer in the market-place, a practised thief in the corn and meal that came to be ground, and he was called proud Simpkin. His wife was gentry-born and her father chief man in the town. She had been reared in a nunnery. A shrewish woman she was and proud. 'Twas a fine sight to see the two of them wending their way to church on Sundays. Simpkin walked first in his cape and red stockings, and she came behind in a dress of the same hue. To have made a jest to her would have been to court death at Simpkin's hands, for Simpkin was

jealous of his honour. They had two children, a daughter aged twenty and a baby son. The girl was a fine strapping wench, taking after her father in looks. Some day she was to inherit all the property and be married to a lord.

The miller had no lack of customers. From all around, grist came to his mill. One of his chief customers was the great college Soler Hall at Cambridge. He ground their wheat and their malt too. One day it chanced that the bursar fell ill and was like to die. The miller did not let this opportunity slip, but stole a hundred times more than before, changing from cautious pilfering to barefaced robbery. When the head of the college accused him he was impudent and denied the charge lustily.

There were at the college two poor scholars, John and Aleyn. In sheer joy at a chance to trick the miller, they went to the warden and asked to be allowed to take the corn to be ground. "We wager," they said, "that the miller shall not steal a grain while *we* are there to watch." At last they persuaded the warden to let them pit their wits against the miller's. Aleyn made the preparations, threw the sack of corn on the horse, took his sword and buckler, and the two set off together. John knew the way and presently they arrived at the mill.

Aleyn began: "Good-day to you, Symond. How are your wife and pretty daughter?" "Ah! Aleyn," said the miller, "I'm pleased to see you, and John too. What is your business?" "Symond," answered

John, "necessity is a hard master. A manless man must needs be his own servant. Our bursar is so ill, that I fear he will die, so Aleyn and I have come to get the corn ground and take it home again." "Right," said Simpkin; "I will do it. But how will you spend the time till it is ready?" "As for me," answered John, "I have never seen corn ground in my life. I will stand by the hopper and watch how the corn goes in." "And I," Aleyn took up, "know as little of milling as John does, so I will stand down below and watch the meal run into the trough."

The miller knew well enough what they were thinking of, but he said nothing, meaning to get the better of them later. When the two scholars were all intent on watching the corn, the miller chose his time and crept out softly. He found their horse standing tied under a bush and untied his bridle. Away ran the horse to the fen, tossing his head and whinnying, and splashing through mud and water. The miller returned without a word, but when the meal was put in the sack and they were ready to be gone, John discovered the loss. "Aleyn," he cried, "look, our horse is gone!" "Which way? which way?" cried Aleyn. "Come, hurry and see what a dreadful thing has happened!" The corn was forgotten. "Oh, where can he have gone to?" they asked. Up came the miller's wife. "Your horse is gone to the fen," she said, "running as fast as he can." "Throw down your sword, Aleyn," cried John, "and

let's off after him. Between us we should catch him. Why ever did we not put the beast in a shed! You're a fool, Aleyn, I'm afraid." Away they went and spent all the day whooping and holloaing to the horse, but he was too wild for them. Just on nightfall, however, they drove him into a ditch and caught him there. Meanwhile the miller had helped himself to half a bushel of meal and bade his wife make a cake of it. "It's not always learning that makes the cutest man!" he said. "A miller has little trouble in upsetting the tricks of a mere clerk."

When at last John and Aleyn came back to the mill, they were wet and dirty. It was too late for them to make their journey home that night. A very crest-fallen couple humbly begged the miller to give them a night's lodging. "Mine is a poor house and small," answered the miller. "But you are scholars and doubtless have the power to turn a hovel into a palace by your arguments. Be content with this, therefore, or enlarge it as you like." "You are a merry man," replied John, "and we are contented with the house. There is money to pay for our supper." So they all fell to and ate their meal and drank good strong ale, till the miller sat himself down in the corner of the settle and began to doze.

Aleyn had been looking at the daughter all through supper, and now, when the father was asleep and the mother gone about some household business, he went and sat by her side, and presently, before she knew what he was doing, put

his arm round her and kissed her. Just at this moment in came the mother. "Sir," she cried, "how dare you behave like that to my daughter! Help, husband, help! Wake up! This wretched scholar is kissing my daughter." Up woke the miller in a fury and ran at Aleyn. In a minute the two were fighting as hard as they could. John looked round for a weapon with which to defend his friend, but the miller's wife was quicker. Up she took a heavy stick that stood in the corner and struck at Aleyn, but, as luck would have it, there came a gust of wind down the chimney so strong that it nearly blew the lamp out. In the flickering light, the blow intended for Aleyn fell on the miller's bald pate. Down he went like a log, down beside him went his wife, wringing her hands and crying out that she had killed him. "No," said John, "he's too tough to die like that. Come, I'll give you a hand and we will take him up to bed." Aleyn and the daughter were not sorry to be left alone. "I like you very well," she said. "Shall I tell you what father did with your meal?" "Do," answered Aleyn eagerly, "and some day, when I'm rich, I will come back and marry you." "I shall be ready!" she answered. So the next morning, when they rode away, John and Aleyn not only had all their meal, despite the miller's knavery, but Aleyn had won a bride as well, while the miller had had a well-deserved beating and lost his daughter to a clerk!

* * * * *

While the Reeve was speaking, the Cook was chuckling to himself, and at the end of the tale he laughed loud and long. He was as good a cook as you would find within the walls of London. His pies, I have heard, were works of art. "I'll tell you my tale now," he said, "a rollicking story of an apprentice in our town." "Well, say on, Roger!" answered the Host. "You're a fine lad, I'll be bound."

So the Cook began his tale; but I had only heard a few sentences when we came upon a bad stretch of road where the water from the previous week's rains lay in great puddles, and in many places the soft mud gave under our horses' feet. We therefore had to ride slowly and in a straggling line, picking our way carefully.

Being near the end of the party, I heard no more of the Cook's story, nor of the tales that followed it that day.

When we at last reached the inn at Dartford, where we were to spend the night, I heard that the craftsmen from the town had told their tales that afternoon.

TALES OF THE SECOND DAY

THE next day, the 18th of April, the Host suddenly turned his horse about and faced the company. "Lordlings," said he, "what with oversleeping and late starting we waste our precious time. It's ten o'clock, by my faith, and no tale told yet this day. Come, you learned Man of Law, begin and let's have no more dallying!" "Host," said the Lawyer, "I never break my agreements; a man must obey that law which he himself has made. But it is difficult for me to find a tale. Geoffrey Chaucer, our poet, has told them all in his rhymes. There is not a love story left to tell, and I have no taste for rude jests. You will make fun of my plain unpoetical speech, I have no doubt, for a lawyer's language is none of the prettiest. Yet I will do my best. This is my story." So, with his silver girdle jingling as he rode, he began:

THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE OF THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEYINGS OF CONSTANCE

There was in Syria a great sultan. His merchants travelled far overseas and brought him back news and great riches. One company reported to him the events in Rome. They had noticed

especially the wonderful beauty of the Emperor of Rome's daughter, Constance. They never wearied of telling of her loveliness, her goodness and her courtesy, until the sultan's heart burned for love of

THE MAN OF LAW
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

her, and he knew that unless she became his bride he would die.

Now Constance was a Christian, and the sultan a Mohammedan; yet to win the lady of his love the sultan was converted, and he and many of his followers were baptised. At last the emperor consented that his daughter should marry the sultan. She set sail for Syria very woefully. "Father," she

said, "must I, thy darling daughter, set forth on this perilous journey, and live in a far land, a Christian among unbelievers? Must I never see my dear parents again? Alas, woman has no power of her own! In youth her father rules her; when she is old her husband is her lord. But Christ and Christ's Mother will preserve me. In them is my trust." So with tears she started, and her maidens wept with her. None the less, when the ship came to land she put away her grief and bore herself as became a bride.

The sultan in splendid array, with all his court in attendance, came and met her at the water-side, and received her with all solemnity. Amid revelling and noble pageantry he led her to the palace.

But under the flowers there lurked a scorpion, the queen-mother. Ah! root of wickedness, filled full of guile, fierce worshipper of false gods! She had plotted death to all Christians, and at the feast slew every Roman except Constance herself. Not even the sultan, her own son, escaped, but, because he had changed his faith, she slew him among the others.

Pity now fair Constance left alone among her foes! She has no help nor succour save the Lord God in Whom she trusts, and Who will never fail those that put their faith in Him. The queen-mother had devised a fate worse than death for her hated daughter-in-law. Alone, without company, she was placed on a ship which was cut loose to sail the sea. Yet in men's hearts there is

some pity, and not without food or raiment did Constance set forth. Truly the arm of the Lord is mighty to save. He that guarded Daniel among the lions guarded Constance in her open boat. Far and wide, for three years and more, she drifted; but amid storm and calm, cold and heat, she was kept safe; neither did her food nor drink fail her. The arms of God were around her. He, Who fed five thousand in the wilderness, preserved this lone woman for His own honour.

At last, guided by His hand, the bark drifted northwards through the vast ocean till it came to the shores of Northumbria. There the governor of the district found her with her ship and hearkened to her prayer for help, though she was a stranger, and he could scarce understand the Latin she spoke. In his home she had rest, and bore herself so gently that the governor and his wife, Hermengild, loved her as their own daughter. Never did she cease to preach Christ's gospel, and such was her holy life that many believed through her.

Yet even here a cruel fate pursued her. There was a young knight who hated Constance because she would not love him. One night he crept through the window of the room where she slept with Hermengild, and, approaching the bed, killed Hermengild, and left the blood-stained knife lying by Constance's side. What grief was there when day came! Constance, whom all loved, stood accused of murder and must be tried before Alla, the king of

the land. Foremost among her accusers was this false knight, but when all spoke in her favour save he alone, Alla bethought him to test his witness. The Bible was brought and the knight asked to swear that what he said was true. He took the book and with his hand on it swore in the name of God that Constance had done this thing. She, all pale, as one who sees death before his eyes, prayed that at her need help might be granted to her from on high.

Then indeed the hand of God smote down the perjurer. With a cry he fell on his face, and a voice from heaven rang out, "Thou hast slandered the guiltless and yet I hold my peace." Thereat wonder fell on all men, and Alla, moved to wrath, condemned the traitor knight, but Constance appeared so fair and holy in his eyes that after no long time he wedded her. Lo, now! Constance is become a queen, and seems to all men's sight at last favoured of Heaven.

But even so Providence had yet more trials in store for her. She who had been so constant and so true must bear more sorrow for the glory of God.

No long time after the wedding Alla went forth to fight the Scots and left his queen in charge of the governor who had found her at first. Once more a queen-mother plotted her doom, Donegild, King Alla's mother. Constance bore the king a son, a lovely boy, whom they named Mauricius. This seemed the very crown of bliss, yet through this joy Heaven meant to try Constance still further.

The governor wrote letters to the king to tell

him the glad news, and gave them to a messenger to carry with all haste. But the queen-mother was jealous of Constance, and, when the messenger passed, called him in and made him drunk with wine. Then, while he slept, she opened his pouch, took out his letters and changed them, so that when he came to the king the letters that he delivered were false ones written by the queen, which said: "Your wife is an elf, and has borne a baby so ugly and horrible that all are afraid of it." The king was sad at this news, but he so loved Constance that he wrote back: "Keep the child till I return; I would obey the will of God."

Again, as the messenger passed the palace of the king's mother, she called him in and made him drunk with wine. Then, while he slept, she opened his pouch, took out the letters and changed them, so that the letters which the governor received were false ones and said: "Constance must not abide in this land longer than three days. It is my will and decree that she be placed in an open boat with her young son, and left to the mercy of the winds and waves."

The governor wept, and so did all the townsfolk, for they loved Constance. Yet, as the letter bore the king's seal, they could not but obey it, thinking it true.

On the fourth day Constance, with deadly pale face, went towards her little boat. Her baby cried piteously, but she lulled it to sleep, and placed her

kerchief over its face to protect it from the sun. When she was afloat she prayed: "O Mary, Mother of God, help me now, a poor mother with her little child, alone, at sea."

On went the boat; but again, amid storm and calm, wind and rain, it was unhurt. For five years it drifted, now north, now south, now east, now west, about the wide ocean. God's hand guided it, and God protected it, so that Constance and her child were fed and happy.

Now when the emperor heard of the treachery of the Syrians, he sent a great army in ships to punish them, and as this army was returning to Rome the captain suddenly saw a little boat travelling without oar or sail. As it came nearer he saw that it contained a woman, and when he took her aboard, he quickly perceived that she was noble. Her baby boy was in her arms. The captain in pity took her to his home, but the woman would not say who she was, though she lived with his family and served them well. *You* have guessed by now that the woman was Constance.

Some years afterwards the good God put it into Alla's heart to go to Rome. His host there was the very captain with whom Constance was living. When she heard of his coming she hid herself, but arranged that her boy should stand before Alla at the feast. The child was very like his mother, and at once the king asked his history. The captain told him of the coming of these two sea wanderers. Alla eagerly asked to see the mother.

At last Constance came, though unwillingly, for she was still deeply grieved, believing that her husband had really sent that cruel letter. When Alla saw her he embraced her tenderly, and for a long time they talked until the past was made clear. Alla, it seemed, had punished the wicked old queen with death, and had mourned for Constance ever since. Great was their joy then, and very pleasant was it to see their reunion after so many years of danger and separation. Soon they went all three to the emperor, and his happiness at finding again his long-lost daughter knew no bounds.

The ways of God are wonderful indeed! Who would have dreamed that after such sorrows such happiness was possible for all? May Jesus Christ of His mercy send us like joy after woe, and keep us all in health and goodness. Amen.

* * * * *

"That was indeed a virtuous tale!" said our Host. "Sir Parish Priest, I swear 'tis your turn now, by heaven! Tell us your tale. By my halidom, I am eager to hear your story." "What ails the man that he swears so?" answered the Parson. "Ho, ho!" laughed Harry Bailey. "Have we a Lollard here? A man who would teach us our manners and save our souls? Would you *preach* us somewhat, Sir Priest?" "That he shall not!" answered the Shipman; "no sermons for me. I've known adventures in my time, sailing the seas from Jutland to Cape

Finisterre. I know all the harbours of Brittany and Spain, and many's the cask of good Bordeaux wine I have landed while the coastguard slept. Oh, a good life is that of the sea, with the wind a-blowing a man's beard and tanning his skin, and storms to brave and pirates to fight. I've seen men walk the plank, I have. No mercy to the prisoner on the high seas! Home they go by water as soon as may be! No land-lubber am I! Let me tell my yarn; a jolly one, I promise you."

So as we jogged along the Shipman told his tale of a merchant who sailed afar in search of wealth, and whose home meantime was robbed, for his wife was not true to him and let false priests trick him. It was a coarse vulgar tale, as sailors' stories often are. It amused some of the company, for indeed men's tastes are different and are pleased in different ways.

As the Shipman finished, Harry Bailey's blustering manner changed. Courteously and meekly he rode up to the Prioress, and in his politest voice addressed her.

"My Lady Prioress, if you please, and if you are sure it will not grieve you, I would propose that you tell a tale next. Will you deign to do so, lady dear?"

"Gladly," she answered.

She was a pleasant figure to look upon. Her wimple was snow-white, and her black cloak fell in graceful folds from her shoulders, while now and then her red coral rosary, with its green gaudies, showed as she moved the arm on which it hung. Her features

were very beautiful, with a straight sensitive nose, clear grey eyes, and a full small mouth. She told her tale in a cultured voice, which pleased us all greatly. This was her tale:

THE PRIORESS'S TALE OF A LITTLE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

O Lord, our Lord, Thy marvellous name resounds
Through all the earth. To Thee do children cry
"Hosanna to the King of kings!" E'en I
Will add my voice in honour of the Maid,
That Lily Flower, Thy Mother, loved of Thee.
Grant me Thy grace and pity, deign to hear
My prayer, and take of all I do, the praise.

In a great city of Asia, among the Christian folk, many Jews once dwelt, gathered there by the lord of the land for villainous usury, and through their street, year in year out, passed children on their way to school. Among these children went a widow's son, a little chorister seven years of age, and as he went to school never did he fail to kneel and do reverence to the statue of the Virgin and sing the *Ave Maria*.

One day at school the elder children were singing the anthem *Alma Redemptoris*, and the little child, looking up from his primer, drew as near to them as he dared, and listened till he knew by heart the first verse. However, he was too young to know what the Latin meant, so he besought his

friend to explain, even going down on his knees to beg him to tell it all correctly. The friend was willing to teach him. "They say," he said, "that it is in honour of Our Lady, and it is to Her we sing it, but I can tell you no more. I know the song,

THE PRIORESS
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

but not enough Latin grammar to translate it." Then the child was even more eager to learn, and daily his friend taught him till he could sing it perfectly, words and music: and as he went to and from school each day, he sang it merrily as he passed through the street of the Jews. But Satan, who first led mankind astray, whispered to the Jews to

be revenged on one who dared to praise the Mother of Jesus so boldly in their streets. And they plotted with a murderer, who one day seized the child, killed him, and cast away the body in a pit.

("O cursed folk!" then cried the Prioress, "your secret is in vain. Murder will out whatever men may do. But thou, O blessed martyr, thou shalt sing pure songs among the choirs that John of Patmos saw in his vision as he stood before the great White Lamb.")

The poor widow waited all that night, and in the morning, pale from anxious thought, she sought the child at school and everywhere through the town.

Distraught with a mother's grief, she cried piteously throughout the town, until she learnt that her son was last seen in the Jewry. Then by Jesus' help she came to the very place where her young son lay, and though he was dead already, as she drew near he began to sing the *Alma Redemptoris* so loud and clear that all the Christian folk passing through the street gathered together. Seeing how things were, they sent for the provost, who arrested the Jews. Their guilt was clear, and he dealt with them according to the law, praising Christ and His Virgin Mother for this marvellous revelation.

The little child, they bore to the abbey, singing sad songs of lamentation. His mother swooned by the bier. When mass had been said over him the abbot sprinkled him with holy water and made ready to bear him out to burial. Yet when the drops of

blessed water touched him, once again the child sang his *Alma Redemptoris Mater.* At this the abbot, all amazed, charged him to say why, when to all seeming he was already dead, he still sang in this fashion. Then said the child, "When I should have died, the Mother of God came to me and placed a grain on my tongue, and by her grace I sing thus happily in her honour until the grain be taken from me, and then in heaven she will receive my soul, never leaving me, because in life I loved and worshipped her always."

The abbot and his cloister marvelled to hear this miracle. Then the abbot took away the grain, and they bore the little body and laid it in a clear marble tomb with honour befitting so noble a martyr.

O blessed Hugh, whom wicked Jews also slew, pray for us weak people that Mary, Mother of God, may grant us grace. Amen.

* * * * *

The effect of the Prioress's tale was to make the whole company silent and wondrously solemn for a while, so feelingly had she told the story of the miracle; but at length our Host began his joking again. He looked round the party and caught sight of me. "What man are you?" he asked. "You look nowhere but upon the ground as though you would find a hare there. Come here, good sir, be cheerful. Make way!" he cried to the others, "let this man pass. I swear he is no stripling, his waist is as large as mine. He ought to be a gallant man and

fond of company, but he rides alone, and is so silent that I suspect the elves have bewitched him." The company laughed. "Tell us your tale," said Harry Bailey to me again, "and let it be a merry one." "Good host," I answered humbly, "I know few tales. All that I can offer is a ballad I learned long ago." "That's good!" said the Host. "Begin. It's a jolly tale, I'll wager." This is the tale I told:

CHAUCER'S RIME OF SIR THOPAS[1]

Listen, lords and ladies gay,
I will sing my roundelay,
A song both gay and witty.
Sir Thopas was the knight yclept,
As bold a wight as ever stept,
The hero of my ditty.

Now he was born in Poperhinge,
The child of many a fond longing,
Upon a summer's day.
His father's house was in the square,
And he a powerful lordling there
In Flanders, miles away.

His skin was white as white could be,
Like lilies from the deep valléy,

[1] The ballad that Chaucer tells is a parody of the worn-out poems of chivalrous adventure, in which the knight rides on endless quests. These poems were still popular in Chaucer's day.

His lips were blushing roses.
His cheeks were pink and fair to see,
And (on my troth) possessèd he,
The seemliest of noses.

Golden as saffron was his hair,
Golden his beard that stretched so fair
Down to his girdle strong.
From Cordova his shoes they name,
His hosen brown from Bruggë came,
Of silk his robe full long.

In hunting none might by him stand,
And oft he rode with hawk on hand,
For him did maidens sigh.
But of their longing they took no good,
Forth he rode to the green wood
His fortune to espy.

And it befell upon a day,
The flowers sprang in the woods so gay,
The birds their lays were singing.
His steed was of the dapple grey,
His bridle, like the Milky Way,
With silver bells was ringing.

Then pricked he through the verdant wood,
He rode as softly as he could
For high adventure thirsting.
Green grass below, green leaves above,
Filled full his heart with ardent love,
Till it was nigh to bursting.

Then tired he lay upon the grass
To give his horse a breathing space,
  And dreamed of love's sweet sway.
"An elf queen must my lady be,
No other worthy is of me
  In all the land, I say."

Now is he risen and got to horse,
For he would seek his love perforce,
  Where'er she may be kept.
Then over hill and over down,
Through meadows green and moorlands brown,
  His peerless charger stept.

The birds sang loud, there is no doubt,
Some sang in tune and some sang out;
  The throstle and the jay.
The flowerets sprang about his feet,
Arrayéd in their garb so neat,
  With every colour gay.

When the birdies thus did sing,
Sir Thopas fell in love-longing,
  And spurred his gallant steed.
The sweat ran down his sides amain,
To any gentle heart 'twas pain
  To see him thus to bleed.

The larks on high trilled out their song,
And some sang right and some sang——

"Stop, for Heaven's sake!" cried the Host at this point. "I'm tired out by this story. Never in my life did I hear worse doggerel."

I must say I was offended by this remark. "Well," I said, "you have let everyone else finish. Why should *I* be prevented from going on? I'm doing the best I can." "Are you?" said Harry Bailey. "Then I think you had better try some other sort of story. Perhaps in prose you might manage to be improving, even if you could not amuse us. *This* is sheer waste of time." "All right," I answered, "I will tell you a prose tale. It is an old one and told with variations, but just as we do not accuse the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, of untruth because their accounts of Christ's life differ, so you must not blame *me* if my tale is not like other versions." Then I told my tale. It was a very virtuous one about Melibeus and his good wife Prudence. It was full of quotations from the classics, and I fear it was rather long, for I noticed that towards the end many of the company began to yawn, and the Shipman started whispering to his neighbour and tittering. So perhaps, as it was not exactly a success, I will not repeat it here.

As I finished, the Host, who alone had seemed pleased with it, said, "I would give a barrel of ale that my wife had heard this tale. She has none of the patience that Prudence showed. Alas! she is a regular termagant. If I have occasion to beat one of the servants,

out she comes with a great clubbed stick, crying, 'Break all the rascal's bones. Kill the dog!' Then, when she goes to church, if everyone does not bow to her, home she comes in a rage and vents it on me. 'Coward!' she says. 'Go and take vengeance on those despiteful neighbours. Will you see your wife insulted and not move a finger in her defence? Ah! that I should have married a milksop and a coward.' And so she goes on, till I am really afraid I shall do murder, for I am a dangerous man with a knife, though I cannot stand up to *her*.—Well, enough of this. Lo! Rochester is not far off. Monk, come, tell us a tale. It is your turn now. Your tale should be a cheerful one, for you look a merry soul, well fed and lusty. I guess you are no penitent, but cellarer or sexton or some other officer in your monastery. Well, take no offence. Many a true word is spoken in jest!"

The Monk took his jibing with patience, and answered him soberly. "I will tell such a tale as I can with honesty. It shall be a life of St. Edward, or else some tragedies; that is to say, the stories of men who fell from great prosperity into misfortune. I have more than a hundred at home in my cell, all composed in hexameters. I will tell some that I can remember, and excuse me if I tell them somewhat out of order." So he began, half chanting as if in church.

THE MONK'S TALE OF DIVERSE MEN WHO FELL INTO MISFORTUNE

In tragic manner will I now lament
The fate of those who fell from high degree
Into the depth of woe. For Fortune is
A fickle goddess found, and none may hold
Her favour for himself, when she would list
To flee. Trust not to blind prosperity,
If old examples yet may make us wise.

Lucifer

With Lucifer, though he an angel is
And not a man, I will at first begin.
Fortune may not an angel smite, but through
His sin he fell to deepest Hell from Light.
O Lucifer, thou brightest angel form,
Now art thou Satan plunged in Hell's black night.

Adam

All in Damascus God has Adam made,
From dust to human shape, and given him rule
In Paradise, to lord it and enjoy
All bounty, save that single tree alone.
But to temptation is he fallen a prey,
And driven forth to labour and to death.

Hugelino, Count of Pisa

Of Hugelino, Pisa's lord, no tongue
For pity may his sorrow well declare.
For he with his three sons, poor babes as yet,
Immuréd in a tower, was left to die.
Alas! to keep such birds in such a cage
Was cruel sport.
In prison is he now condemned to die,
On a false charge, that one assoiled him of,
And stirred the people's wrath to doom him thus.
But up to now his food at least had he,
Though scant and poor, yet it might him suffice.
Upon a day befell it at the hour
When his jailer was wont to bring his food
He heard the gate shut, but none came him near,
And in his heart the thought upgrew that they
Would starve and bring him foully to his death.
"Alas," he cried, "that ever I was born!"
And from his eyelids fell the heavy tears.
His little son, that was three years of age,
Cried unto him, "O father, will they bring
Our dinner? Father, give me food, I die."
And so he cried and wept thus day by day,
Till at the last, within his father's arms
He lay and died. The father all distraught
Began to bite his arms and gnaw his hands,
And rail on Fortune for her cruel deed.
His children thinking that for hunger he
Thus bit his flesh, said to him, "Eat of us.

Thou gavest us life, take thou that life again."
Yet they ere ever many days were sped,
Lay down within his arms and breathed their last.
Himself, bereft of all, of hunger died,
Cast to such doom from fortune's high estate.
If you would further read of all this tale,
Go look to Dante, for he will not fail.

Holofernes

Never did captain, servant of a king,
Subdue in battle kingdoms more and great,
Nor more prevail in the fierce shock of fight,
Nor win from all his age more high renown,
Than did great Holofernes. Fortune blest
His steps, and led him up the steep of fame,
Till suddenly he fell and lost his life,
Ere yet he wist that danger threatened him.
Not for the loss of life and wealth alone
Did men him dread, but throughout every land
He would make folk their own true god deny.
"Nebuchadnezzar is God," did he proclaim,
"No other God may here adoréd be."
So in the land none dared his wrath provoke
Save where Eliachim the priest held rule.
Heed now what death befell this captain proud.
Amid his host he drunk and sleeping lay
Within his tent, large hung as is a barn,
And yet for all his pomp and all his might,
Came Judith secretly, and from his neck

Smote off his head and bore it to her town.
And none of all the guards knew what befell.——

"Ho! stop!" cried the Knight. "Good sir, I beg you no more of this. A little of sorrow suffices. It is as wearisome, Sir Monk, to hear the stories of those who from great prosperity have fallen to poverty and death, as it is cheering to hear of those who from poor estate rise to greatness and fame. Of the latter I pray you tell." "Yes, indeed," shouted the Host. "By St. Paul's great bell, you say right, Sir Knight. The Monk must stop this doleful talk. It's not worth a fly. Your tale annoys all the company, Sir Monk, Dan Piers, or whatever your name may be. I assure you it is only the tinkling of your bridle bells that has kept me awake this last half-hour. What's the good of a tale if the audience is all asleep? Come, tell us a tale of hunting."

"No," answered the Monk with dignity. "I take no pleasure in mere frivolity. Let another tell a tale. I have said my say." At that the Host turned to the Nun's Priest. "Come near, Sir John. You tell a tale to cheer us. What though your horse be a sorry jade, all bone and mud, you have a merry heart, I know." "I have indeed," laughed the Priest, "and here is my tale."

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE OF CHANTICLEER

Once upon a time there lived in a cottage an old widow with her two daughters. She made her living as best she could by keeping pigs and a cow, and by growing a few vegetables. Her cottage was small, and all sooty from the smoke of the fire. The cocks and hens roosted for the night on the rafters.

Now among the fowls was a wonderful cock whose name was Chanticleer. The whole country-side admired him. His comb was so red, his bill so black, his plumage such a magnificent colour, that his like had never been seen; and, moreover, he was a very wise bird. One might almost say that he was an expert astronomer. Every morning, just as the sun rose, he crowed, never making the least mistake whatever the time of year. He had seven hens who walked behind him in the yard. The fairest of them, and the one he loved best, was called Pertelot. She was so beautiful that Chanticleer had loved her ever since she was a week old, and now every night he roosted by her side. Every morning when it was time to go out he sang her a little song beginning, "My love is to the meadows gone."

One morning, as Pertelot slept by Chanticleer's side, she heard him begin to sigh and groan and murmur in his sleep. "What is it?" she asked. "In

truth you seem to groan like a man in pain." "Alas!" said Chanticleer, waking up; "may fortune guard me. I have had a horrible dream. Never in all my life was I so frightened. I dreamed that I saw a terrible beast ready to gobble me up. It was as big as a dog, and had a tawny coat with black on his ears and on the tip of his tail, and, though I have never seen such an animal, the minute it turned its eyes on me I was all of a tremble with fright." "Shame on you!" cried Pertelot. "You a man, and frightened by a dream! Do you think any woman will respect you if you do not show yourself more courageous? We like our husbands to be something of heroes. Besides, dreams are nonsense. They are no guide to the future, unless it be to tell you what medicine you need. For if a man be over-choleric, then he dreams of fires and red beasts, and if melancholy, of black bears. I will undertake to prescribe for you as there is no doctor in the town. Groundsel grows in our yard and hellebore. Peck them up, and take a few worms, and that will be the end of your dreams." "Peace, wife!" returned Chanticleer. "What do you know of such things? Would you go against the authority of Holy Writ? Did not Joseph dream dreams? Was not Pharaoh instructed by them? Look at classical authors, Cato, Seneca, Cicero. Dreams were ever revered. Do you not know how by a dream a foul murder was discovered? Shame on you, to talk of medicines and groundsel! But still, though my dream is surely prophetic, I can

forget it when I look upon your beauty, my love. 'Tis gone from my mind at a glance of your eye. So now let us out of doors."

With these words he flew down from the beam and went out into the yard, and all the hens followed him. There he stalked up and down trying to forget the terrors of the night. He was so proud he could scarce set foot to earth. All his wives ran after him to eat the grains of corn he found. When the sun rose higher Chanticleer sang his morning carol, and his wives settled down to have dust baths in the warmth.

Suddenly Chanticleer caught sight of an animal lying among the grass by the side of the yard. It was Russel the fox, who had lived for three years in the wood near by, and now had grown bold enough to break through the hedge and make his way into the farmyard. The moment Chanticleer saw him he jumped back in terror, quite forgetting his song. It was the creature of his dream! The fox was ready to calm his fear. He got up from the grass and advanced politely to Chanticleer. "Do not be alarmed at my appearance," he said. "I have come with the best intentions. I am, in fact, a friend of the family. Both your father and mother spent some time in my house—to my great satisfaction. I was listening to your singing. You have a marvellous voice, and it is doubtless inherited. I remember your father had a way of standing on his toes, shutting his eyes and stretching his neck. When he did that his top notes were really wonderful. Do you do the same?"

Chanticleer was delighted with this flattery, and at once began to crow his best, shutting his eyes and stretching his neck as the fox had described. Then, as soon as his eyes were shut, the fox sprang forward, caught him by the neck, threw him over his back and was off to the wood. Alas! poor Chanticleer, what a fate is thine! True are dreams and men should heed their warnings!

Would I had the tongue to curse that day! That star-cursed day, that black Friday on which the noble Chanticleer was borne away by the foul deceiver! The hens, in terror, set up such a clamour, cackling and wailing, that out ran the widow and her daughters to see what was the matter. Out came the neighbours, out the dogs, out the very cows and pigs, and joined in the chase. All cry, "Out! harrow! stop thief!" Like fiends in hell they scream. The geese in fear fly over the tree-tops, the swarming bees stream from their hive. Verily, not a mob of rioters seeking to destroy the heretic in their midst ever raised half so fearful a din and clamour as did these pursuers; but in spite of them all the fox reached the very edge of the wood in safety.

There Chanticleer recovered from his terror and said, "You have me fast. If I were you I would call these base pursuers churls to their faces." "Why, so I shall!" said the fox. But, as he opened his mouth to speak, away flew the cock and perched on the branch of a tree. "Come down," cried the fox, "I mean you no harm. If you will but come down

I will explain all my intentions towards you." "No," said the cock. "I have been deceived once; twice is too much. Never again will I be caught by flattery." "And I," said the fox, "will never speak when I should keep my mouth shut."

Sirs, if you think this tale mere foolishness, then look deeper for the moral, for, I assure you, there is one. Do you find it! Are not all things written for our instruction? Now God make us all good men and bring us to happiness at last. Amen.

As he finished the Host praised him. "Excellent, Sir Priest," he said. "Your tale is like yourself, all wit and laughter, but with some seriousness too, I'll be bound. I knew by the twinkle in that sharp grey eye of yours that you could joke on occasion. Let's see now if your fellow-priests can match you."

Then the other two priests took their turns. They told us no tales, however, but spoke to us of morals and the great power of Holy Church. Their words were full of high meaning, but my poor wit cannot remember all they said. Also the Wife of Bath had grown confidential towards evening, and, amid her talk of husbands and clothes, pilgrimages and cloth measures, I could hear little of the priests.

Their solemn talk was a fitting conclusion to our second day's riding, and that night we lay at Rochester.

TALES OF THE THIRD DAY

THE Doctor began the story-telling of the third day with a tale about a wicked judge who caused the death of a fair maid in Rome. During the telling of it Harry Bailey grew more and more excited with pity for the girl, and anger against the judge. At the end he burst out, "This was a false churl, I say! A shameful death befall all such treacherous men! The maid paid dearly for her beauty, did she not, good Doctor? Truly, it was so pitiful a tale that unless I have a draught of cool corny ale to cheer my spirits, or else hear a merry tale at once, I shall weep for sorrow! Come, Sir Pardoner," he called, "tell us of mirth and quips and cranks!" "That shall be done," answered the Pardoner, stopping the love song which he had been singing all the morning; "but first I must drink at this inn here, and eat a cake." The gentlefolk of our company looked suspicious. "We want no vulgar tales," they said. "Let him tell us of morals that we may learn good, or let him hold his peace." "That shall be as you wish, good folk," the Pardoner replied. "I will think of something virtuous while I quaff my ale."

As we left the inn he began thus:

"Gentles all, you should hear my voice when I

preach in church! It rings loud and clear like a bell, and I never falter, for I know all I have to say by heart. My text is always the same: 'Greed is the root of all evils'—only you must know I speak it in Latin to my congregation, for Latin gives a learned tone to my speech, whether the audience understands it or not.

"Would you care to know my procedure? Here it is:

"First, I announce whence I have come, then show all my bulls, with the seals of my liege lord the Pope attached, then my letters of authority from cardinals and bishops and patriarchs, so that everybody believes in me and none dare interrupt me in my holy work.

"Then I produce my long crystal tubes, packed full of rags and bones which the ignorant are pleased to think are sacred relics. See," he said, opening his wallet, "here is a pillow-case made of Our Lady's veil, and here a piece of the sail from the ship in which Peter sailed before he walked on the Sea of Galilee. I have also a fine shoulder-blade made of brass, fashioned by a Jew. That's a very profitable possession, I can assure you.

"When I have roused people's curiosity and awe in these ways, I begin my speech.

"'Brethren all,' I say in my fullest voice, 'behold this bone. It has great powers. If it be washed in the water of a well, any cow, calf, sheep or ox that drinks of that well will be cured at once of any

disorder that affects him. No matter if he have eaten poisonous insects or plants, or been stung by poisonous flies, or suffer from scab or sores, the water in which this wonderful bone has been washed will cure him. Listen carefully to what I say. This bone has never been known to fail. Why, if a man drink every morning of water it has touched, not only himself but his cattle will prosper, his goods will multiply, he will grow rich and famous. This bone can help a woman too! If her husband is jealous, all she need do is to wash this bone in the man's broth, and at once all his suspicions will vanish.

"'Here now is a mitten, as powerful as the bone. Of a truth, if a man puts his hand in this mitten all his grain will yield, some sixty, some a hundred fold. No matter whether he owns wheat or oats, he that but touches this mitten will grow wealthy indeed.

"'But, of course, he must offer groats and pence to Holy Church! For such benefits surely any man would give of his goods!

"'Of one thing I must warn you. Only those who are free from deadly sin can get help from my relics. If here be any here that have sinned great sins, let them not approach. Yet by my power as a Pardoner, I can forgive and pardon such sins as be not deadly. Draw near! only those who have deep sin in their hearts will hold back. Come then, those who know themselves to be pure and innocent, receive the good that awaits you, offer of your substance to the Church, and be blessed!'

"By such speeches and such conduct I have earned a hundred marks a year since I was Pardoner. But I think that verily I deserve it. Why, my gestures in the pulpit are a joy to behold! I stretch forth my neck, looking now this way, now that, like a pigeon in a barn. My head and my hand keep time with my voice, and I sing better than anyone I know in my profession."

I could well believe this of the Pardoner. He looked like a man who could please a congregation. He had long straight yellow hair hanging about his shoulders and bright shining eyes. He wore no hood, but rode according to the latest fashion, bare-headed except for a small cap.

"Oh, I can preach, good folk," he continued. "It's a pity, of course, that I am the greatest sinner against my own text, for I own that all I do is for my own gain. But there, while I can talk so well, and tell merry and comforting tales, why should I live in poverty and make baskets for a living? I like money, woollen clothes to wear, and cheese and wheaten bread to eat. I cannot follow the Apostles' lead. This life offers too many enjoyments for me, even though widows starve to enrich me!

"But you asked for a tale; and now I've loosed my tongue with a drink I'll tell you one. Although I'm none too good myself, my tale shall be virtuous, and one that I tell from the pulpit."

With this introduction he began the following tale in a rich musical voice:

THE PARDONER'S TALE OF THE MEN WHO WOULD SLAY DEATH

"There dwelt once in Flanders a band of young men who indulged in every kind of folly and wickedness. They practised drinking, dicing, swearing, harping and dancing day and night, and in this unhallowed way of life they never thought how they racked anew the poor tortured limbs of our dear Lord Jesus. Brethren, there are many great and grievous sins, but among the most deadly are drunkenness and gluttony, for the glutton makes his belly his God and bows down to that, enslaving the whole world to his appetite. Doth not the scripture say, 'There walk many enemies of Christ's cross, whose end is death, because they have made their appetite as their God'? How foul and loathsome a sight is a drunkard! He who is mastered by this horrible habit of drink loses both reason and sense, and all that distinguishes a man from a brute. My dear brethren, keep you from wine, from red wine and white. Remember the teaching of Holy Church; remember how in the days of the Old Testament all great victories were won by men who abstained from strong wines. Remember what history tells of the sad end of those who, overcome by drink, have been foully done to death. Read, mark and learn, my brethren, hear and abstain.

"Beware of gambling and dice and false swearing. How many good men have been undone by these! Doth not the scripture say, 'Swear not at all'? Yet alas! how many befoul their mouths with

THE PARDONER
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

blasphemy and besmirch their souls with false oaths. Do you not so, good people. Keep your mouths free from such pollution, look to your lips that they speak no guile.

"And now to my story.

"These three revellers I told you of were one morning early sitting in a tavern when they heard a bell

tinkling before a corpse as it was carried out to burial. At this one of them bade his servant go and ask whose it was. But the boy knew already. 'Sir, it is an old companion of yours and he has been destroyed by a false thief Death, who came upon him as he sat drunk and pierced him through the heart. Indeed, he slays all the people in this district—a good thousand have perished. I would bid you beware.'

"'Tis true,' said one of them. 'In a village near he has slain this year all sorts and conditions of men. His habitation is there most likely, we had best beware.' 'No,' said another. 'It were better to set forth ourselves and slay him. We three will take an oath never to rest, as God will aid us, till we have destroyed Death.' Then they took this oath and set forth to seek the enemy. They had not gone far along their way when at a stile they met a very old man. He greeted them courteously. 'Good sir, why are you so old and wretched?' cried one. 'Why?' said the old man. 'No youth will take on my age in exchange for his youth, nor will my mother earth open to receive me, though I for ever knock on her with my staff.' Then they asked news of him of Death and he told them that he had left Death just there by the oak tree in the road, and that he surely would abide their coming. On they hurried till they came to the oak tree, and there they found on the ground a pile of bright golden florins, eight bushels or more, it appeared to them. At once they forgot their quest of Death, turned all their

thoughts to this wealth and sat them down beside it. The first to speak was the worst scoundrel of the three. 'Who would have thought that we should have met with such fortune as this? Why, we have here the means of living our whole lives long in enjoyment, if only we can convey this treasure to my house or to one of yours. But we must do it secretly by night, otherwise we shall be accounted thieves and hung for what is our own. My plan is that we draw lots and that he on whom the lot falls go to the city and bring us bread and wine, and the other two keep watch here till nightfall.'

"They drew lots and it fell on the youngest, who leaped up and ran to the town for food and wine. When the other two were left alone together, the one at once began tempting the other. 'What a life we could live if all this money were divided between us two only,' he said; 'and so it could be if you would give me your promise to keep secret the plan I tell you.' The other agreed. Then said the first, 'We two are stronger than our comrade. When he returns, make as if to struggle with him in sport and I will run him through with my dagger.'

Meanwhile, as their friend went to the city, he thought ever and again of the coins and longed to possess the whole pile. At last the Devil sent him an evil idea. He went to the shop of an apothecary. 'Sir,' he said, 'I pray you give me some poison for rats. I am overrun with them, and there is also a polecat in my yard that kills my chickens.' The chemist gave him

poison and told him it was so strong that no more than a grain would kill any animal. At this the rascal went and bought three bottles and put poison in two of them. The third he kept clean for his own use, and then he filled up the bottles with wine and made his way back to the others. When he drew near they carried out their plan and stabbed him; but, chancing to take and drink from one of the poisoned bottles, they were killed in their turn.

"O cursed sin, foul ending to lust! Even so do gluttony and avarice lead on to the dread crime of murder. O ye that hear, turn before it is too late from cursing and swearing, dice and covetousness. Think of our Lord who bought us with His precious blood and of whom the world was not worthy; think and repent. Here if you repent and turn from avarice may you buy pardon. Bring up your offerings, crowns, or silver brooches and spoons or rings. Housewives, bring your wool and the High Power will grant you pardon. Here in my roll I write your names as pure as on the day you were born!

"But, gentlemen, there was one point I forgot to mention. I have in my pack as fine pardons and relics as any in England. They bear the Pope's seal upon them, and if any of you will kneel down and give me your offerings then you may kiss the relics and I will grant you absolution, or, if you prefer, you may buy a fresh pardon at every mile's end, only, of course, you must make a fresh offering every time!

"It's really very fortunate for this company that such an experienced pardoner is among you. The risks of the road are so great that at any moment anyone may fall and break his neck, and on such occasions it's a great help to have had one's sins adequately pardoned.

"Come, gentle people all. Let the Host begin. His sins enwrap him round. Stand forth, good Host, make your offering and kiss my relics! Why, for a groat you may kiss them all. Unbuckle your purse anon and begin!"

"Go to," said the Host. "We know your relics! You would have me kiss your dirty old rags. Were they in my hand, I'd fling them into a pig-trough!"

The Pardoner went white with rage, and could not answer a word; but the Host went on, "I'll have no more dealings with you, nor with any angry man." We all burst out laughing, for it was obvious that the Pardoner was furious with himself for forgetting that he had exposed himself before telling his tale, and so had lost the chance of reaping money from us for his false relics.

The gentle Knight interposed. "Sir Pardoner," he said, "no more of this. You were fairly answered. And you, Sir Host, my dear friend, I pray you kiss the Pardoner, and, Pardoner, kiss him in your turn, and let us laugh and go gaily on as we did before." So they two kissed and were friends again, and we went on our way.

The Wife of Bath had been talking to the Monk in an undertone. Seeing her opportunity in the pause following the Host's and Pardoner's quarrel, she addressed the company at large.

"Even if there was no authority to back me, my own experience, I can tell you, would give me the right to speak of the trials of marriage. Why, since I was twelve I have had five wedded husbands, and now I am a widow again I am quite ready to welcome the sixth. God meant me to marry and I shall do my duty; but I shall always rule my husband."

Here the Pardoner broke in. "I was thinking of taking a wife myself," he said, "but if the wife is to be master I must think more of the matter." "Oh! there is worse to come," she returned. "There is a bitterer draught ere you get to the bottom of this cup." "Well, tell us your story all the same," he answered, "and spare no man!" "Why, so I will," she said, "but let no man be offended. I speak in jest, you know, though the jest may be rather sharp. Well, as I was saying, five husbands have I had, and three were good and two bad. By good, I mean that they were old and rich, and gave themselves up to me body and soul, for they loved me well, and had given me all their property.

"Now for the two of them that were bad. The first bad one was my fourth husband. He was gay; but I tell you I could be gayer, and between us things came to a pretty pass. However, in the end I went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and when I

came back it pleased God that he should die, and I buried him as he deserved, and God rest his soul. My fifth was a scholar. He had studied at one time at Oxford and then came to live with a neighbour of mine. I had met him before, but I first really loved him at the funeral. I was weeping, or doing my best to pretend to, and had my handkerchief over my face, but looking out under it I noticed his legs and feet as he was walking along in the procession, and prettier legs, I swear, I never saw. 'Tis true he was only twenty and I forty, but I was buxom enough and had money and looks. At the end of the month we were married. O dear me, what a life I led with him! It was I who was infatuated this time, alas! I made over to him all my property, and much I repented that. Not one thing would he do that I wished, and worse, he once boxed my ears so hard that I became quite deaf. At the same time I would not give in to him, and though he threatened to leave me and quoted the authority of the ancient Romans for doing so, I stuck to my own way of life.

"And now I'll tell you why I tore the pages out of his book. He had a book he was always reading and laughing at. A great many authors' works were bound up in it — Valerius and Theophrastus and a cardinal of Rome named St. Jerome, and other bishops, and Tertullian, also the parables of Solomon and Ovid's "Art of Love." They were all tales of wicked wives, and he knew them better than all

the stories of virtuous women in the Bible. And of course this is how it would be! All these tales are written by men and scholars. Now if women wrote them, very different they would be.

"Well, as I was saying, one evening he read these to me, Eve and Delilah and the death of Hercules and countless more till I could bear it no longer, so I snatched his book and tore out the pages. Then up he jumped and gave me that blow on the head that I told you of, that made me deaf, and I fell down on the floor as if I was dead. Then he was terrified till I woke a little out of my swoon, when he came near and kneeled down by me and said, 'Dear sister Alison, forgive me; before God I will never smite thee again. This time it was your own fault as you know.'

"Well, to make a long story short, though it took us a long time, we made an agreement. He gave the management of all the affairs into my hands, and he even burnt his book and was very polite when I was there. So when I had my wish we had no more quarrels, and you would never find a better wife than I made him if you were to search from Denmark to India. Now I will tell my tale."

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE OF THE QUEEN'S RIDDLE

In the days of good King Arthur fairies yet danced in England. As yet there were no priests with their blessings to drive them from hall and kitchen, bush and fairy ring. But now, where the elf walked, wanders the begging friar, and women can go out o' nights and expect no harm.

In those old days a goodly knight once fell into sin through the charms of a lady, and was tried for his crime and condemned to death. But the queen and her ladies begged him from the king, to give him life or death as might seem to them most fitting. After much thought and discussion the queen spoke to him thus: "Sir knight, you know your life is in my hands to save or take as I will. To you I will grant life if you can answer me one question and answer it aright: 'What is it that woman most desires?' A year will I give you to find your answer, and at the year's end you must return to me and suffer the penalty if you fail to answer correctly."

Away rode the knight sad at heart, and all the year he wandered seeking an answer to the question. Some told him that women love riches best, and some honour, some mirth and merry-making, but no two told him the same thing. Some said that we love flattery and, to my mind, they were not far

wrong! Some said that we like to be thought able to keep a secret and trustworthy. Ovid in his tale of Midas's wife has shown that this is wrong, for she could not endure her secret, but must tell the water—if no living man—that her husband had two ass's ears.

Now the knight, when he found that he could not learn the answer to his question, took his way homeward full sad at heart, for the time was come when he must appear before the queen and pay his forfeit. As he journeyed in this mood, he came at length to a forest glade and there he saw four-and-twenty fair ladies all dancing on the green. Up to them he went, eager to ask his question, but before he could come to them all had vanished save a hideous old hag sitting on the ground. "This way lies no road," said she, "but come, tell me your business. It may profit you, for old folks are oft-times wise." Then he told her of the question he must answer and begged her to give him an answer if she knew one. The old dame was ready enough to do so. "But," she said, "in return you must promise that you will grant me the first thing I ask of you after you are pardoned." The knight pledged his word, and when things were thus concluded between them, they rode their way together to the court of King Arthur.

All the chief ladies of the realm were assembled, and the queen herself was sitting as judge. The knight did not hesitate for his answer, but boldly said, "In all cases, what a woman most desires is

to have the full trust and faithful love of her husband. Let any of you deny it who can." Then thro' the hall there was silence, and no wife or widow of all those assembled there dare deny that this was what she most desired, but all admitted that the knight had answered truly and deserved his life.

Then up rose the old woman. "Lady," she said, "I taught the knight this answer, and in return he promised to grant my first request if it lay in his power. Now I ask him to take me for his wife. Have I not deserved it by saving his life?" The knight was aghast and prayed the old woman to take his gold or land if only she would not make him her husband. But prayers were of no avail, and whether he would or no, the knight must wed her and take her to his home. Yet he put no good face upon the wedding, but with sighs and gloomy looks he went through the ceremony.

When they were alone together his wife chid him. "Is this the courtesy that King Arthur's knights show to their brides? Have I not saved your life, and can you not welcome me in better fashion to your home?" The knight answered, "How could I welcome you when you are so ugly, so poor and of such low birth?" "If that be all your complaint," said she, "I can prove that I am in no way to blame for it. How is a man noble save by noble deeds? Though a man can bequeath his wealth to his heirs he cannot leave them his own virtuous way of life. Each man makes his nobility for himself. And as

to poverty—did not our Lord Jesus choose the life of a poor man, and can you blame that which God Himself chose? Poverty cheerfully borne is a noble thing and no disgrace. What we *do* matters! 'Gentle is as gentle does!' You say I am old and ugly! Would you rather have me as I am and your dutiful and obedient wife, or so young and gay that you are disregarded? Choose which you wish, you can have your choice!" Then the knight did not know what to say, but bade his wife choose herself. "Then you trust me," she said. "Why yes, truly, dear wife," he answered. At that she laughed and said, "Husband, I have my wish. Kiss me and you shall find me, by to-morrow's dawn, as fair as any woman in all the length and breadth of the land, and moreover, I will be to you a true and loving wife and obedient all my life long." . . . So it fell out, and never was there a happier couple in all the land.

Now, I say, may fate send us all young and handsome husbands who will love us and trust us, but as for morose, perverse old greybeards, a plague on them!

All the way along, the Friar had been scowling at the Summoner. So far he had said nothing, but as the Wife of Bath finished her tale he began, "Dame, yours was a good tale, but in some matters it went rather deep. We only want amusement on this journey, not scoffing. If the party would like I would tell a story about a summoner. You can be

sure it will be a gay one. No one could tell an edifying story about such a man." The Host interrupted, "You ought to be polite, Sir Friar. Leave the Summoner alone and get on with your story." "All is well," said the Summoner. "Let him say what he likes; I will get my own back presently."

So the Friar began:

THE FRIAR'S TALE OF THE WICKED SUMMONER

"There was a summoner who served an archdeacon and went round the country smelling out offences and summoning the culprits before the court. Fines he collected and bribes, but it was on the latter that he most grew fat. Day by day he sent his spies abroad and pounced now on the rich, now on the poor, and, not seldom, he terrorised the innocent and robbed them of their all——" "Stay!" cried the Host, "this is too violent, get on with your story." "I am only telling the truth," said the Friar. "The truth is not always courteous," returned the other. "Well, I will go on," said the Friar. "This summoner was one day riding to accuse a certain old widow. She was innocent, but he meant to have a bribe from her before he let her go. As he was riding through a green wood he saw another man dressed as a yeoman just in front of

him. When they met they greeted each other. 'Good day,' said the summoner. 'Good day,' answered the other; 'dost thou ride far?' 'No,' answered the summoner, ''tis but to the next town to collect a debt due to my master.' 'Art thou then a bailiff as I am?' 'That is so,' answered the

THE FRIAR
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

summoner; for shame prevented his owning his true calling. 'Then we be brothers,' replied the yeoman. So they shook hands on it, and agreed to ride together.

"Never for a minute did the summoner stop talking, he was as full of prying questions as a dog's skin of hairs. 'Tell me,' he said, 'where do you dwell?' 'Away in the north country,' answered the yeoman, 'where I hope I shall see you one of these days.' 'What is the way thither?' the summoner went on.

'Ere we part,' was the answer, 'I will make it all clear to you.' 'Tell me,' said the summoner again, 'since we be two of a trade, have you any tricks that might be of service to me in my work? I am not a man to stick at trifles, so if you know of any ruses, even if they are not *quite* honest, I should be glad to hear them.' 'We are alike again,' replied the yeoman. 'My master is a niggard and I have to make what I can my own way; I must say I do not do so badly out of it.' 'You are a man after my own heart,' continued the summoner. 'Come, tell me your name.' At this the yeoman began to smile. 'Do you really wish to know? Well, then, I am a fiend from Hell and I range the world seeking what men will give me.' 'Is that truly so?' said the summoner. 'I thought you a man as I am. Can you change your shape at will?' 'Yes, truly,' the other answered. 'In whatever guise we may best accomplish our purpose—that we wear. We go on all errands, God's and the Devil's, and some we torment for their soul's good, as we did Job, but some we take body and soul together.'

"By this time they were quite close to the town for which they were bound. In the muddy road was a carter with a waggon of hay. The wain had sunk in down to the axle-trees and the three horses had not the strength to drag it out of the mire. The carter was yelling at his horses, 'Gee-up, Jock! Gee-up, Bessy! Pull, my beauties, pull!' And when they failed to move the cart, 'The demons take you,

cart and all! Pull away, or the fiend catch you!' When he heard the carter swearing like this, the summoner began to nudge the other. 'There is something for you,' he said; 'that carter is giving you horses and waggon. Why don't you take them?' 'Wait,' said the yeoman, 'he does not mean what he says.' Just at this moment the horses by a great effort pulled the waggon free. 'God bless you, my good horses!' said the carter. 'Gee-up! Heaven be praised, we are clear.' 'There,' said the yeoman, 'you see men do not always mean what they say. We have to be sure.'

"Before long they came to the cottage where the widow lived. 'Just watch how *I* manage affairs,' said the summoner, and he began to knock on the gate and shout, 'Come out, come out, you wicked old woman!' The widow opened the door at length and came hobbling out. 'What witchcraft were you doing inside?' asked the summoner. 'I swear it was nothing good. I have here an order for you to answer in the archdeacon's court for your manner of life. To-morrow you must appear and answer for your sins.' The poor old woman fell on her knees. 'How can I come?' she said—'and I just risen from a bed of sickness. Let me send someone to answer for me.' 'Not so,' said the summoner. 'Either you appear yourself or you give me twelve pence to get the charge withdrawn. I should be doing you a *great* favour, for the archdeacon is no mild man to such hardened sinners as you.' The

old woman began to cry. 'I cannot give you twelve pence, nor six, I am too poor. I am innocent of any crime; I practise no witchcraft. I cannot come to court, I am too weak.' 'Stop that!' said the summoner; 'if you do not pay what I ask I will take your brass pan. You owe it me already for crimes of long standing.' At this the woman wept more and more. 'A curse on you,' cried she, 'may the fiend fly away with you and the pan too!'

"At this, the yeoman, who had been standing by, said, 'Dame, do you mean this? Would you give the summoner over to the fiend?' 'Yea, that I would,' she answered, 'and my pan too, so that I might be rid of him.' At this the devil laughed. 'Now you are fairly mine!' he said to the summoner, and with that he tucked him under his arm and carried him off to Hell.

"So may we all be kept from wicked deeds, and Heaven shield us from the power of wicked men! Amen."

* * * * *

This story naturally made the Summoner furious. He glared at the Friar, and trembled with anger. "Let me have my say," he cried. "I'll show what sort of stories are told concerning friars. They naturally know all about the fiend. Just look at their names! What is the difference between 'friar' and 'fiend'? Why, there was once a friar that was taken by an angel to look at Hell, and at first as they

went down he saw never a friar, though many thousands of other people. 'How comes this?' asked the friar of the angel. 'Are all friars so holy that not one of them is in Hell?' 'Wait,' said the angel, and he led the friar down to the lowest pit where are chained all the dreadful monsters.

THE SUMMONER
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

'Look you now!' said the angel, and there, sure enough, were thousands and thousands of friars all suffering the vilest torments. That's the kind of men friars are!" Here the Host interrupted. "Is this the kind of tale you mean to tell?" he asked. "Yes," said the Summoner, "and worse. The friar is an extortioner and a dupe and a hypocrite." "If that is so," said the Host, "we will not hear it. You

ecclesiastics can wrangle somewhere else. We want good temper in *this* party." The rest of us agreed with his sentence and the Summoner had to swallow his rage as best he could.

Harry Bailey turned to the Clerk of Oxford. "Sir Clerk," he said, "you ride and look as coyly as a newly-married bride at her marriage-feast. Let be your studies, sir. Don't think your philosophies here—a time for everything, say I! Tell us your tale, sir, for you must play your part in the game; and make it amusing. None of your high-falutin style! Keep that for your state letters;—and, I tell you, don't preach as the friars do, we want to be amused, and we want to understand what you say." Gently answered the Clerk, "Host, I am in your hands, for you are the governor of this party. Indeed, sir, I will tell you my tale. It is one I heard in Padua. Petrarch told it me—Francesco Petrarch, now dead, alas! whose verse is dear to Italy, who in learning and sweet speech surpassed all his fellows. I would I could tell it as he did; but my wit is not great enough. He would describe in full to you the country where my story took place, Salucia, and Mt. Vesulus. I can tell but the bare story. This is it."

THE CLERK'S TALE OF THE PATIENT WIFE

The country of Salucia is a pleasant land; it is a valley sheltered by Mt. Vesulus, and open to the west. A duke ruled it once, named Walter. He was beloved of his liegemen, for he was brave and young, courteous, and delighted in the hunt. All his thought, however, was for his present pleasure, and little care he took for the morrow. Only in one thing did he displease his people: he would not wed. At this they were so grieved that one day they sent certain of their number to plead with him. The eldest among them was the spokesman. "O noble lord," he said, "in your pity and mercy spare us, your servants, and do not punish us because we come to you with our request. Long have we lived the servants of your house, and always have found happiness in your service. Nowhere is greater felicity than in this goodly land. One thing only irks us: you have no wife, and may die without an heir and the land pass to a stranger. Then woe to us! Time creeps on unnoticed, and before you are aware your youth will have given place to age. For our sakes, great lord, take you a wife. Let us choose you one; the noblest and fairest should be your bride. Relent; grant us this request, that everywhere may be perfect happiness beneath your sway."

Duke Walter was moved by their earnest speaking. "I will grant you this," he said, "although I had thought to live unmarried and free all my days. But you must fulfil my conditions. I will choose my own bride when and where I please, and you must promise to reverence and obey her whoever she may be; poor or rich, beautiful or ugly, she must be regarded as though she were an emperor's daughter. Promise this, and I will wed as you desire." They promised gladly, but to make sure that the duke would indeed fulfil his word, they asked him to appoint a day when the marriage should be. This he did, and forthwith great preparations were made.

Squires and knights from all parts came to Salucia to do honour to this marriage. The feast was ordered, brooches and necklaces for the bride were made by the best craftsmen in the town, and all the court prepared to wear its most splendid robes. Yet, strange to say, when the day of the wedding came, no one knew who the bride would be. Some were afraid lest Duke Walter should again change his mind and not marry after all. Some still hoped and trusted, for surely their duke would not fail them after so many preparations had been made!

On the day appointed for the marriage, Duke Walter and his court assembled at the palace in all their magnificence, with music and gaiety, shining armour and jewellery. To everyone's surprise the duke led them in procession from the palace to a little village adjoining the town, and here dismounted near

a poor hovel. This was the home of Janicula, a poor old man, who would have starved had not his daughter earned a living for them both by gathering herbs and keeping a few sheep on the common. Griselda was not only beautiful, but renowned throughout the village for her gentleness and patience and for the love she bore her father.

When the duke and his company arrived in the village she was just returning from the well, thinking that if she could finish her work in time she would go to see this royal wedding. Great was her surprise, therefore, to see the procession stop and the duke dismount near her home. Still greater was her amazement when she heard him call her by name. In haste she set down her pitcher in the ox-stall and ran towards him, then knelt to receive his commands. The duke's voice was gentle. "Where is your father, Griselda?" he asked. "Lord," she said, "he is within," and at once led the duke to Janicula. He took the trembling old man by the hand and said, "Be not surprised at my visit. To-day I must marry, and have come here to find my bride. Often when hunting I have seen and admired your daughter, Griselda, and now I would take her as my wife to live with her to my life's end. Do you consent to this, my man? Tell me: will you take me for your son-in-law?" The old man grew red with excitement, and trembled so that he could hardly speak. "Indeed, my dear lord, I wish only what is pleasing to you. In nothing would I oppose you." "Then call

Griselda," said the duke, "for I would talk with her here in your presence." So, while all the court and the villagers wondered and gossiped outside, the duke told Griselda of his plan, and asked her these questions.

"Will you," he said, "always obey me in everything? Will you promise to accept readily all I desire for you? Whether I hurt you or please you, make you cry or laugh, will you always keep steadfast your love and reverence for me? Promise me this, and we will wed at once!"

Griselda answered, "All unworthy, my lord, am I, that this honour should be done me. Willingly I promise to bear all things. Let your treatment be kind or cruel, my reverence and obedience will not change."

Then Duke Walter took Griselda by the hand and led her to the door of the cottage. There he called to the people and said, "This is my wife. Honour and worship her according to your word!" Then fine court ladies waited on Griselda, took off all her old ragged clothes, and dressed her in lovely garments which the duke had prepared for her. They combed her hair, and placed a shining crown upon her head, so that when she again appeared before the people they hardly knew her, she had become so radiantly fair. Her husband then set her upon a white horse, and with great rejoicing the procession rode back to the palace.

The duke and Griselda lived in great happiness.

Griselda behaved so beautifully that men would not believe that she had been reared in a poor cottage. Everyone loved her for her gentleness and justice, and even folk in far lands heard of her goodness and came to see her and talk with her. She could even handle state affairs, and many times by her tact brought men to peace and prevented war. When her husband was away, she ruled the land wisely in his stead.

By and by she had a baby daughter, much to the joy of the duke and his people. Griselda was indeed happy; but alas! when the baby was two years old a strange thing happened. The duke was suddenly seized by an irresistible desire to test the patience and love of his wife. The desire was stupid, as it seems to me, for it might have destroyed the happiness of them both; but Duke Walter could not resist it, do what he would, so one day he said to his wife, "Griselda, you cannot have forgotten how poor you were before our marriage. Now, although I love you dearly, my courtiers are aggrieved that they must obey and serve one who is really only the daughter of a peasant. Their discontent has increased since your baby came, and therefore, to quell this grumbling, I must take away your child. See now if your patience and obedience are indeed as steadfast as you promised they should be."

Poor Griselda felt cold at heart, but showed no sign of her grief and fear to her husband. "My child and I are yours, my lord," she said. "Work your

pleasure upon us. My love and obedience shall not change." Duke Walter was glad at this, but could not bring himself to change his cruel plan. He sent to Griselda a fierce-looking soldier, who seized her baby roughly, as though he would kill it at once. Griselda bore all meekly. She asked that she might kiss her baby once before it was put to death. The soldier allowed this, and as she gave it back she said, "Receive again this little maid. She should have had a tenderer nurse, but my lord's will must be done. One thing only I ask, if you kill the child, bury its little body safe from beasts and birds." She said no more, and her manner showed no anger or resentment.

The soldier told all to the duke. "Take the child secretly," he said, "to my sister, the Countess of Boulogne. I will give you letters to ask her to tend and rear it carefully; yet the child must never know its birth and parentage, and Griselda, my wife, must think her babe is dead." The soldier obeyed.

For many months Duke Walter watched to see if he could find in Griselda any signs of impatience and grief, but she was humble as ever, and never even mentioned her baby nor asked after it.

After four years a baby boy was born to her, and again she was happy, and the people rejoiced greatly; but when the baby was two years old, again Duke Walter was possessed with the desire to torment and try his wife. Again he said that the courtiers disliked the child because the mother was a peasant's daughter,

and again he sent the rough sergeant to seize the child and act as though he would kill it. Again Griselda kissed her baby farewell, and begged the soldier to bury its little body carefully; but still her manner was meek and gentle and showed no resistance to the cruel decrees of her husband and lord. The duke as before sent the baby secretly to Boulogne, and there sister and brother grew into fine handsome children, yet no one knew who they were.

If Duke Walter had not known for sure how dearly Griselda loved her children, he might have thought from her manner that she did not care for them at all; for neither by word nor deed did she ever swerve from her wifely love and reverence for him. Yet his people were amazed and angry that their lord should show such cruelty towards his own children.

When the daughter was twelve years old, the duke's mind was again filled with this strange desire to try Griselda still further. This time he sent to the Pope, asking for letters to declare his marriage with Griselda annulled, and when these came, he proclaimed to the world that he was about to marry a fair young girl, the descendant of a noble house. He spoke roughly of the matter to Griselda. "You know," he said, "I may neither speak nor act as does a ploughman or a peasant. My will must be that of my people, who now demand that I take a high-born maid to wife, and leave you. I am sorry, but it must needs be that we part. Therefore, I charge you, leave your fine robes and your jewels,

and with such possessions as you brought here, return again to your father's house. Let's see now whether your fine promises of meek obedience and patience hold." Griselda, though grieved in heart, answered gently, "I well remember, my lord, that from my father's house I brought you nothing except my true love and faith. My poor clothes were all taken from me when fine women dressed me for my wedding. Ah me! how kind you seemed to me that day! I will obey you always, and go humbly and willingly. Your word is my law, but grant that I may take my smock at least, to cover me when I go." The duke assented gruffly, and away went poor Griselda, with bare head and feet, clad only in one plain garment, till she came to her father's house. Many followed her, weeping, for they loved her dearly, but none except her poor old father dared help her or plead for her.

She had lived in her lowly hovel for some days, tending her sheep and caring for her father as of old, when the duke's messenger came to summon her again to the palace.

She went readily and greeted her former husband with all humility. "I wish my marriage with my young bride to be magnificently celebrated," said the duke. "You, Griselda, know all my tastes, as well as the customs and the appurtenances of the palace. It is my will that you take charge of the household matters for this wedding. Arrange the rooms, order the banquet, and see that all things are done well and promptly."

Griselda obeyed gladly. Not one look of envy or jealousy did she give, not one impatient angry word did she speak, but managed the servants, arranged the rooms, and looked to the cooking so carefully that all the duke's guests marvelled at the excellence of the preparations. Many wondered who this poor woman in tattered clothing could be.

At last the new bride arrived. Her rich dress, polished manners, and beautiful face won all men's hearts at once. "Indeed," they said, "our master is no fool. This maid is younger and fairer than Griselda, and she is, moreover, highly born." Yet no one knew from whence this maid had come, or who her parents were. With her had come her younger brother, a gallant youth, as handsome as she.

The company entered the palace. Griselda grew busier, for the feast must be prepared, and guests accommodated, and all must be prompt and fair to please the duke.

When all had taken their places for the feast, the duke called Griselda and said, "How do you like my new bride? Is she not fair?" "I have never seen a fairer," answered Griselda; "yet, my lord, she is young and tender too. Treat her more gently than you have treated others; she, reared so richly, cannot endure hardness like one who has known no softness nor luxury in her life."

When the duke heard her gentle and kindly answer, his heart relented at last. "Enough of this, my wife," he cried. "Indeed I have proved your loyalty

and patience to the uttermost! Come now, my noble, true Griselda," and he took her in his arms and kissed her before them all. Griselda was amazed, but the duke went on: "See now—these are your two children. This fair maid is your daughter and mine. She was said to be my bride but to try and tempt you. And this fine youth is your son and mine." Griselda could not speak for joy and surprise. She seized her children and kissed them eagerly again and again. "Thank God and your kind father you are safe," she said; "how my heart has grieved for you!" And with pity and love and joy she swooned, still holding her children so tightly that only with difficulty could they disentwine her fingers from their hands. The ladies of the court took her to her room, and there restored her, and arrayed her in a wonderful dress of gold, setting a crown on her head. Thus she appeared again before the duke and his court, and all men said they had never seen her look so lovely before.

Never again did Duke Walter seek to try his wife, and for many years they lived happily together with their two children. The pretty daughter married the most powerful prince in Italy, and the son succeeded his father when he died, and ruled Salucia well for many a long day.

Such is the story of Griselda. The Wife of Bath looks as though she doesn't believe that a wife would suffer so humbly, and indeed, I expect that if you sought through a whole town nowadays you wouldn't

find above two or three Griseldas: but I tell my tale, not to suggest that men should copy the duke and seek, like him, to prove their wives' patience, but to show you all how woes and trials should be borne. For if a frail woman could bear with such meekness the rough assaults of a husband, should not we bear with resignation and meekness the sufferings sent by Almighty God to chasten us?

* * * * *

Thus spoke the Clerk; but, seeing us all look a little sad for the trials of patient Griselda, he suddenly burst into a merry song:

Griselda's dead, alack the day,
And buried in Italy far away,
O! men beware,
And do not dare
To test your wives in spiteful play.

For patience, in these times more crude,
By modern matrons is eschewed,
And wives to-day
Are sterner clay,
And know the art of being rude.

You, wife, who would your husband rule,
Be not a weak obedient fool;
By force or guile
Or crafty wile,
O make him your subservient tool.

If you his purpose would deflect
In all your gayest raiment decked,
Throughout the town
Walk up and down,
Till he your beauty will respect.

We joined in the Clerk's song, and felt much cheered by its merry tune.

Then the Merchant told a tale of a wife who was the exact opposite of Griselda, and much more akin to the Wife of Bath. Many of the company enjoyed it, and of a truth it was a good contrast to the Clerk's tale.

After the Merchant's tale we talked lightly to one another of men and matters until we reached the inn at Ospringe where we were lodged for the third night of our pilgrimage.

After supper the Yeoman told a tale[1] of the adventures of a lad named Gamelyn, and how at last he got the better of his unjust brother.

THE YEOMAN'S TALE OF GAMELYN

A knight lay dying. He summoned his neighbours to consult about the division of his property between his three sons. The neighbours debated together and decided to give all to the two eldest sons, and nothing to Gamelyn the youngest, who was still a mere boy. This division did not please the

[1] The text of this tale was found amongst Chaucer's papers. It seems most suitable for the Yeoman to tell it, and as there is nothing in Chaucer to contradict this, we give it to the Yeoman here.

knight; so, rousing himself weak as he was, he gave his own decision in the matter.

"John, my eldest son, shall have as much land as he can plough with five ploughs. Such was my father's bequest to me. My second son shall have five ploughlands too, for so much have I won with my own right hand. But all my other possessions of land, of servants, and of goodly steeds, I bequeath to Gamelyn. I beseech you, good neighbours all, see my wishes fulfilled!" Saying this, he died, but, as Gamelyn was too young to have the management of his property, all was given into the charge of his elder brother till Gamelyn was grown up.

This brother, however, was no true knight, and let all Gamelyn's property fall into decay, and kept Gamelyn himself in his house rather as a servant than a brother, though in time Gamelyn grew so tall and strong that the man who dared to anger him was brave indeed.

One day it chanced that Gamelyn stood in his brother's yard and thought of all his good cornfields left unsown, and all his houses in ruins and his noble oaks cut down through his brother's mismanagement. As he stood and pondered thus, his brother John came by and asked in a surly voice if dinner was ready. Gamelyn became furious at this treatment. "Go," he cried to his brother, "and cook it yourself! I'll be your servant no longer." His brother was amazed at this boldness. "How now, Gamelyn!" he said; "you have never spoken like this before.

What ails you?" "By my faith," answered Gamelyn, "never before did I think of all the wrongs I have suffered at your hands. My parks are broken up, my fields lie unsown, my houses are in ruins. All the goods my father left me are wasted through you. A curse on you, brother!" His brother was angry at this answer, yet he feared Gamelyn's strength too much to face him alone, so he called to his men, "Here, my men, beat this proud rascal for me and teach him to behave himself to his betters."

Down came the servants armed with staves. Gamelyn looked around for something with which to defend himself and found a pestle standing by the wall. This he snatched up and wielded so vigorously that the men fled this way and that, and his brother ran for safety up into a tower. Looking down from the window he was seen by Gamelyn. "Come down, brother," Gamelyn called up to him, "and I will treat you as I treated your men." "Not so whilst you hold that pestle," answered his brother, "but if you will lay it aside I will come down and grant you whatever you ask." Gamelyn was ready enough to believe his brother. He laid aside his pestle and answered, "All I ask is the land that my father left me." "That you shall have," his brother replied, "and all the damage it has suffered these many years I will make good." So the two kissed, and peace was made for a season.

No long time after the news came that a wrestling-bout was arranged, with a ram and a ring as

prizes for the winner. Gamelyn thought that he would enter as a competitor. He asked his brother for a horse and set off. John hoped that he would never come back and barred the gate after him.

Gamelyn came to the fair and alighted from his horse. Just by him stood a franklin mourning the death of his two sons. "How did that befall?" asked Gamelyn. "It was the champion wrestler who threw them both and slew them. Great reward would I give to any man who would avenge them." "I am ready," answered Gamelyn. "Do you hold my horse and guard my clothes while I wrestle, and I will promise to make the champion pay dearly for your sons' deaths." "Thanks be," answered the franklin, "I shall be avenged. Never fear for your horse and clothes, I will guard them safely for you." Gamelyn pulled off his shoes, stript off his coat and went barefooted into the ring. There stood the champion boasting of his successes. "Who art thou, poor fool," he cried, "that comest here courting destruction? Better men than thou have perished here to-day!"

Nothing daunted, Gamelyn replied, "You know my name and my father's. Sir John of Boundys he was, a good knight, and I am Gamelyn his son. Come on, do your worst and let's see whose arm proves the stronger!" "I know you, Gamelyn," cried the champion. "Young as you are, you are impudent and proud. But come, we'll soon settle this account."

With that the fight began, and fierce was the struggle. But Gamelyn stood firm against all his

opponent's efforts. At last Gamelyn said, "Come, you have done your best to throw me; try now if you can defend yourself against one of my tricks."

With that Gamelyn rushed at the champion, and with one rapid twist he threw him so heavily on his left side that his arm snapped and three ribs were broken. "Now," cried Gamelyn, "shall we count that a throw, or will you have another try?" "Not I," said the champion. "Never in all my life have I met so fierce a wrestler. So far as I am concerned the prize is yours."

Gamelyn stood in the ring to see if anyone else wished to dispute the prize, but no one came forward. At last the stewards of the ring declared Gamelyn victor and he took his prizes and rode home, the crowd following him in admiration.

His brother saw the return from his castle. "Shut the gate, porter," he cried. "We will never have Gamelyn inside this house again." The porter went about the business unwillingly enough, but when Gamelyn knocked at the door he refused to open, and bade him be gone. "Not yet," answered Gamelyn, "I have friends to feast. Stay," he said to the others, "yesterday there were five tuns of wine in my brother's cellar, we will not part till we have drunk them all dry."

At that, without more ado, he kicked the wicket till the bolt broke. The porter fled, but Gamelyn ran after him, struck him a mighty blow and threw

him into the well. All the servants when they saw this were terror-stricken, and not one dared to disobey Gamelyn's orders. A feast was prepared, wine brought, and for seven days and nights Gamelyn and his friends held revel in the hall; but his brother stayed in fear and trembling in his turret, never daring to show his face.

At last his companions had had enough of feasting and would go home. In vain Gamelyn begged them to stay; one by one they departed and he was left alone. Yet even so his brother did not dare to attack him openly.

"That you have wasted my goods I will forgive, but I have one thing on my conscience. When I saw you throw my porter into the well, I swore that I never would forgive you till I had placed you in bonds as a punishment. Now, when I forgive you freely, let me not be forsworn. I will bind you to satisfy my oath and then we can live together in love again."

Gamelyn thought no evil of his brother. "Do as you will," he said. "Never for my sake shall you be forsworn." Then his crafty brother called to his men, and while Gamelyn stood still they bound him hand and foot in fetters and fastened him to a post outside the door of the hall, where everyone going in or out could see him. Two days he stood there and his brother gave him no food, but told all those that came that Gamelyn was mad and must be kept bound, lest he should do someone a mischief.

At last Gamelyn realised that his brother had played him false, and began to wonder how he might free himself from his present plight.

Now in the house there was an old steward named Adam, and on the second day Gamelyn said to him, "Methinks, Adam, I have fasted over-long. If you can get the keys and set me free, you shall have half of all my lands." Adam hesitated, for he feared his master; but pity for Gamelyn was too strong for him. At night, when all were asleep, he crept into his master's room, took his bunch of keys and set Gamelyn free. "They shall not bind me so easily again," said Gamelyn.

When he had eaten food and drunk wine, he declared himself ready to take vengeance on his brother immediately. But Adam restrained him. "I know a trick worth two of that," he said. "Next Sunday there is to be a great feast in the hall. Many abbots and other churchmen will come to it. You shall stand against the post in your fetters, but I will leave them unlocked so that you can free yourself whenever you wish. When they are feasting, ask each one of them to take pity on you and release you. If one of them does so, then you will be free and I shall escape blame; but if they all refuse, I will provide a good staff for you and another for myself, and we two will fight them all. When I give the signal, cast away the fetters and come to me, and I will have the staves ready." Gamelyn agreed very heartily.

When Sunday came, Gamelyn was standing fettered against the post. The guests arrived and were served with a sumptuous feast, but Gamelyn was given no food or drink. When the meal was nearly over, he called to them to release him, but to all his pleadings they returned only rough words and curses. Then Adam looked at Gamelyn and saw that he was furious at their unkindness, so he brought the staves to the door and beckoned to Gamelyn, who at once rushed to his side, and both laid about them heartily. Abbots and priors, monks and canons fell right and left before their blows. Some fell under the table, some in the fire, and many bones were broken. The guests who had come there riding merrily on horses were taken home that night in carts and waggons.

When he had finished with all the others, Gamelyn went to his brother, who had been standing helpless in his place, felled him with the staff so that his backbone was injured, and put him in the fetters where he himself had been.

The servants, either for love or fear, did all that Gamelyn and Adam commanded them, and brought them the best the house could provide.

When the sheriff near by heard of all this beating and wounding, he determined to take Gamelyn and to make him pay the penalty. He sent to Gamelyn's castle four-and-twenty young men, who were only too glad to have the opportunity of showing their valour. They demanded admission to the house, but the porter would not let them in. He rushed to

Gamelyn and told him that the sheriff's men were outside. Gamelyn and Adam slipped out by a side door and, before anyone knew what was happening, Adam had felled two and Gamelyn three of them. The rest were too frightened to resist, and took to their heels.

Soon, however, the sheriff gathered a great number of men, and himself set out to take Gamelyn. "My counsel is this," said Adam. "Let us go to the forest before they come. It is better to be homeless in the woods than to be shut up in prison." They agreed to go together and, having pledged each other in a cup of wine, they took good horses and rode away as fast as they might.

Gamelyn and Adam went all day through the forest until they began to grow hungry and weary with pushing through the thick bushes, which scratched them and tore their clothes, when suddenly they heard a noise as of many men talking. They went nearer to it and, peering through the leaves, Gamelyn perceived a great company of men, about seven score in number, who were sitting down to a feast. "Here's good luck," he whispered, "for I think I see meat and drink." "God grant we get some of it," said Adam, "for I am famished and in need of a good meal." As he said this the chief of the men saw them as they stood among the bushes, and cried out, "By the rood, here are some guests to our feast! Yonder are two young men, and perhaps more behind them. Go and fetch them to me." Up then started seven

outlaws and came to Gamelyn and the steward. "Yield up your bows and arrows," they commanded. "That will I never do," replied Gamelyn boldly, "even if there were a dozen of you, I would fight you all." When they saw he was not afraid they did not attempt to harm him, but asked him civilly to come before their master. "Who is your master?" said Gamelyn, and they all answered, "Our master is the crowned king of the outlaws." "Adam, let us go to him," said Gamelyn. "This man is probably courteous and of gentle birth; he will not, for shame, refuse us food and drink." So they went together to the outlaw king. "Who are you and what do you seek here?" he asked. "We come here because, like you, we dare not stay at home. We shall do no harm except perhaps to shoot a deer or two for food." "You shall have enough to eat," said the king. "Sit down and eat and drink of our best." So they stayed with the outlaws that night.

In the morning the outlaws began to talk amongst themselves, and at last one of them told the king that his guest was Gamelyn, whose deeds were well known amongst them. So the king honoured Gamelyn and made him a chief of the outlaws, next in rank to himself.

Three weeks went by, and the two led a merry life amongst the outlaws. Then the king heard to his great delight that his offences were pardoned, and he could go home to live in peace. The outlaws had to appoint a new king. They wasted no time

in electing Gamelyn, and for some time he led all their expeditions.

Meanwhile the false knight, his brother, was made sheriff of the county, in spite of his injured back, and immediately he set a price on his young brother's head, and declared him outlawed. He sent out all his men to search for Gamelyn and to bring him to trial; but, though they would have been glad to earn the reward, they were sorry for Gamelyn's sake. At last some of them were lucky enough to meet Gamelyn in the woods, but, instead of arresting him, they fell on their knees and told him of his brother's treachery. "I ought to have broken his neck outright," he said. "Go back to your master. I will see him again if I die for it."

So one day, when the sheriff was sitting among his council in the great moot-hall, in stalked Gamelyn, and, throwing back his hood, showed his face to them all. "God be with you all," he said, "except with you, hunch-backed sheriff! Why have you shamed me and our father's house by declaring me outlawed?" The false knight did not reply but called in his men, and in spite of his struggles Gamelyn was overwhelmed and cast into prison.

Now Gamelyn had another brother, the second son of their father, named Sir Ote, as good a knight as ever wore spurs. When he heard all the disgrace that had fallen on Gamelyn for no cause, he was wroth, and taking his horse he rode to the town. "Brother," he said to the sheriff, "there are only

three of us, and you have imprisoned the best of us all. Evil befall such brothers as you! Let Gamelyn out of prison till the justices come to try him, and I will be his security."

"Take him, but if he fails to appear on the day of trial, you shall bear the sentence for him," answered the eldest brother.

"Be it so," said Sir Ote. "Bring him to me."

So Gamelyn was delivered to his brother, and stayed with him that night, but, in the morning, announced that he must go to the woods to see how his men fared.

"That will be evil for me," said Sir Ote. "Unless you return in time for the trial I shall be made prisoner instead of you." "Brother," replied Gamelyn, "do not be afraid. If God spares my life and wits I will come back." "God shield you," said the other. "Go, and return when you think fit."

The outlaws were right glad to see their leader again and had many tales of adventure to tell him. Once more he led them on their expeditions against rich abbots and priors and such haughty men. But the poor loved him, for he never touched their goods.

While Gamelyn and his men made merry in the forest, the false knight, his brother, was busy riding through the country to collect the jury for the trial. He took care to have only those men who, for money, would promise to have Gamelyn hanged, and, sad to say, it did not take long to find a sufficient number of rascals who would do what he wanted.

When the time for the trial drew nigh, Gamelyn

prepared to appear before the magistrate. "Make ready," he said to his men. "When the justice holds his court, we must all be there. For I am bound to go, or my brother will be sent to prison instead of me." The outlaws were not unwilling, and they set out in a body, with their weapons ready for any emergency.

Adam was sent ahead to see how matters stood. He ran on and looked in the hall. There sat the justice with his jury, and before them stood Sir Ote in heavy fetters. When Adam returned and reported what he had seen, Gamelyn turned and cried, "Hear this, my men, Sir Ote stands bound in the court. With God's help we will make my brother pay for this."

"A curse on them all," said Adam. "If you take my advice, not one of all that company shall keep his head." "No," said Gamelyn, "we will punish the guilty, but the others shall go free. I will go and talk with this justice. Let none escape through the door, for I will be judge and hold my court here to-day."

In went Gamelyn amongst the crowd and stood before them all. In dismay the court saw the doors filled with Gamelyn's men, all armed, and was sore afraid. Gamelyn went up to Sir Ote and loosed him. "You have come almost too late," said Sir Ote, "for the verdict is given that I must hang." "If God be with us," replied Gamelyn, "the jury that condemned you shall hang, and the sheriff and judge too." With that he went up to the magistrate and threw him

out of his seat. Then he sat there himself, and had his false brother and the justice put in the prisoners' dock together with the jury. A new jury of his own men was called and a fresh trial was held. The prisoners were found guilty of having conspired to kill Gamelyn and Sir Ote, and the outlaws took them out and hung them. So was the treachery of the false knight ended at last.

Later Sir Ote and Gamelyn went to the king of the land to make their peace with him. He knew the wrong that they had suffered, and forgave them readily. Sir Ote was made a justice, Gamelyn became ruler of all the king's forests, obtained pardon for his woodland followers, married a fair wife, and lived long and happily.

So ends my tale. God save this company and bring us safe at last to His rest. Amen.

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Thus the tale ended, and we went to bed to sleep soundly till the morrow.

TALES OF THE FOURTH DAY

THE fourth day of our journey dawned bright and clear, and we were on the road early. The sun shone brilliantly, the warm air was full of the songs of larks. We were all in the mood for a tale of romance, and were glad when the Host called on the handsome young Squire to tell us his tale. "For certain," said Harry Bailey, "you know more of love than any man." "No, good sir," replied the Squire, laughing and blushing a little; "but I will do my best. If I fail, pray have me excused." And as he rode along gracefully, with his long sleeves fluttering gaily behind him, he told us this story:

THE SQUIRE'S TALE OF CAMBUSKAN AND CANACEE

The land of Tartary in the East was ruled by a great king, Cambuskan, brave and just, honourable and wise, and the possessor of wealth untold. He had made war on his enemies and established his kingdom firm and secure. Yet he was not old, but fresh and strong, rejoicing in life and very handsome. This great king had two sons, Algarsyf and Cambalo,

and a daughter Canacee. She was exceedingly fair; but alas! neither my language nor my wit is sufficient to describe her beauty—only one skilled in speech could do that, and such I am not.

THE SQUIRE
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

When Cambuskan had ruled for twenty years he proclaimed that on his birthday that year a great feast would be held.

When the day came many flocked to do honour

to the king. Outside the birds sang gaily in the fresh spring weather; inside the palace, Cambuskan, dressed in his magnificent royal robes, with a shining crown on his head, sat high on the dais, while his courtiers and guests assembled in the splendid banquet hall. It would take a summer's day to tell you of the strange dishes they ate, and Eastern meats are unknown to me; but I know there were roasted swans and heron stews, and that whatever a man desired was given him. During the feast the minstrels played sweet melodies.

When the third course had been served, suddenly the door at the end of the hall opened, and a knight entered. He was fully armed save for his head, and rode upon a horse of brass. He carried in his hand a broad mirror, and at his side hung a naked sword. As he came nearer, Cambuskan could see that he wore a bright ring on his thumb. He rode in stately manner straight up the hall till he came to the king, and there saluted him with all knightly courtesy. Then he bowed to each of the courtiers in order, and spoke words of greeting to them all. His speech and bearing were so gracious that it was clear that he was a knight of noble birth, and came from a great court. The guests sat silent in sheer amazement. When he had saluted everyone he began to explain his coming. I would I could command the flowing speech and polished utterance that he had; but alas! I am but a squire, and he a knight surpassing even those of the old Table Round, yet I will tell you as

best I can all that he said to Cambuskan at that great feast in Tartary.

"The King of Arabia and India is my liege lord," he began, "and by me sends you his greetings and these four presents in honour of your feast. First, this horse of brass which will carry you wheresoever you will, merely by the turning of a pin in its ear. Whether you wish to soar as high as the eagle, or to travel to the ends of the earth, this horse will carry you there in twenty-four hours. You may sleep upon his back, he will not fail you. He was made by a magician after long watching of the stars, and his like can nowhere be found.

"This mirror will show a man all troubles that threaten him. His friends and foes will show there in clear and true colours, while a woman can see if her lover be false or true.

"This ring gives to the wearer the power to know the language of all birds that are, and to answer them again so that they can understand. It also tells its owner how to use all grasses and herbs—which can heal wounds and which can cure sickness. This ring and mirror my liege lord sends to Canacee.

"This naked sword has these special virtues. It can bite through the thickest and toughest armour, and if a man is hurt by it, the wound cannot heal until it is touched again with the flat side of the same sword. It will not fail its wielder. This gift my lord sends to Cambuskan, together with this same steed of brass."

At the end of his message the knight dismounted and led the horse out of the hall to the courtyard where it stood still, shining in the bright sunlight, for it was beyond the power of any to move it. The sword was carried to the strong tower, and placed amongst the most precious treasures. The ring and mirror were given to Canacee, where she sat at the high table.

Great was the talk among high and low, and many the arguments about these presents. None understood them; each was eager to give his opinion of how they were made, whence they came, their dangers and uses. The horse, some said, was like that of Greek legends, Pegasus, who had wings to fly. "Nay," said others, "it might harbour soldiers, come to destroy our city, like the great wooden horse of Troy in which the Greeks hid themselves to enter the city." "It must be a fairy horse," said others, "made by magic. Have not the minstrels at the feasts sung of such steeds?" Others spoke of the mirror. "It can be made by cutting the glass in different ways," said some. "There was one like it at Rome." "Nay," said others who could read and wanted to show off their learning, "if you read Vitulon or Aristotle, you will see that many such mirrors have been made before." "As for the sword," said some, "Achilles had one like it at Troy." Others spoke of different ways of hardening metal so that you would have supposed they knew all about the matter. Others said that Moses and Solomon had a

ring such as Canacee had been given, and tried to explain how it would tell birds' language. "Cease this jangling," said others in a lordly tone. "One cannot explain anything till one knows the true cause. Why, see how many wondered at the ebb and flow of the tide, or the thunder, until men knew their causes!" So the talk went on, till the feast was ended and the king rose from the table.

Then the dance began to the sound of jolly minstrelsy. Canacee and the ladies of the court were there, and seldom has such graceful dancing been seen. The strange knight danced with Canacee for a partner. I wish I could tell you all the beauty and gaiety of the revelry, but I cannot. I do not know enough of such matters. Then came the supper, with wine and spices and plenty for all, for at a king's feast no man lacks anything. Canacee stayed not to the supper, but went early to bed, with her maidens, for she wanted to be fresh and happy the next morning, not heavy with fumes of wine.

After supper the king went to examine the horse of brass. The knight explained that to go to any place on earth all that was necessary was to whisper the name of the place in the horse's ear, then turn a secret pin, and in a few hours the rider would be at his destination. To stop at any moment another pin must be turned. When standing still the horse could be moved by no man but only by its owner, who must turn another secret pin. The horse would then vanish out of sight, but come again

when the owner called it by name in a way the knight revealed.

The king was greatly rejoiced at this fine present. He sent the bridle to the treasure-house to be guarded and kept, and went again with his guest to the revelry and feasting which lasted until dawn.

Soon after daybreak Canacee awoke to find the sun was streaming in at her window. She felt she must rise at once to see her presents, and to walk abroad in the fresh morning wind. She called her women, who quickly helped her to dress. She was clad lightly for running and playing, and with six or seven companions was soon walking gaily through the park and wood. Canacee understood all the birds' songs, for she wore her magic ring, and she sang with them for very gladness of heart.

Suddenly, upon a tree-trunk, dried as white as chalk, she saw a falcon sitting. The bird's cry was piteous to hear, and as it sat it so beat itself with its wings and pecked itself with its sharp beak that the red blood ran down.

Canacee nearly fainted at the sorrowful sight. She went nearer, however, and saw that the falcon was a princess among birds, with fine white feathers and perfect shape. For a long time she watched it, thinking it would fall from the tree in its weakness. At last she spoke to it. "Why sit you here so sorrowfully?" she said. "Surely it is for the death of some loved one, or the love of some faithless one that you weep. Tell me, can I not help you? I know the virtue of

all herbs, and will find a salve for your wounds." The falcon cried yet louder, and at last fell down in a swoon. Canacee was quick and caught it as it fell. She laid it in her lap and waited till it should recover. At length the falcon opened its eyes, and began to speak. Canacee understood all.

"Long ago," said the falcon, "I lived happily in a tall rock of grey marble, for I am royally born. Many birds wooed me, but especially one, who seemed the very flower of chivalry—a tercelet eagle, strong and famous. For many years I rejected his suit, but at last gave him all my heart and my love, and thought that I had all his true love and service in return. Ah me for the faithlessness of men! One day he must needs go to a far land. We took a loving farewell, yet I was sad at heart and fearful, I know not why. The pain of death could not be worse than the pain of parting to true lovers. I watched and waited for him many a day, but alas! in a far land he saw a kite, and suddenly loved her so that all love of me died in his heart. I am lost and hurt beyond all remedy. Ah, woe is me!"

Canacee's pity for the poor deceived falcon was great. She took it home, and in her own room made a nest for it, draped with blue velvet, the symbol of constancy in love. She tended it for many a day——

* * * * *

At this point in the Squire's tale we came to the door of a wayside inn, where we had our first meal, so the Squire's tale was interrupted and was never

finished in my hearing. I wish I could tell you the end, for it was a good story I am sure. But whether the falcon found her mate again, and how Cambuskan used his horse of brass, and Canacee her mirror, I cannot say. Yet I have heard other men tell that Cambalo fought gallantly for his sister against two knights who came to woo her—and I would fain know the end of that fight.

Thus the Squire's tale remains half told. Try, reader, if you can finish it!

* * * * *

I have told you that in our company was a wealthy Franklin, an old man with red face and beard as white as a daisy. He was a great man in his own country. He had been a sheriff and a knight of the shire, and he deserved such honour too, for to all and sundry he was ever generous. His table stood in the hall all day, perpetually supplied with the best of meat and drink, and any man was welcome to dine there. Fish, flesh and bread abounded in his house, besides all the special dainties which the varying seasons brought. His mews were stocked with many a fat partridge, and his streams with bream and trout. He was greatly interested in the Squire, and full of admiration for his modest, gentlemanly bearing. "I have a son myself," he said, "but he does me no credit. All he cares for is to play at dice and gossip with page-boys. I would he were as fine a youth as you, Sir Squire. Do what I will, I cannot teach him

gentleness and manners!" "Fie on such talk!" interrupted our Host. "You remember our plan, good Franklin? Come, tell us your story now." "Well I remember my promise," the Franklin answered, "and I gladly fulfil it now.

"In the old days the ancient Britons invented and sang to the harp many songs of chivalrous adventure. There is one that I remember which I will tell as well as I can. But at the beginning I ask you to pardon the roughness of my speech. I am a common man and cannot talk as do the nobility. I never learnt rhetoric nor read my classics, and as for the flowers of speech, as they call them, I have none. The only flowers I know are those that grow in the meadows. Still, as I can, I will tell."

THE FRANKLIN'S TALE OF THREE GENEROUS SOULS

In Armorica, the country we now call Brittany, there lived a knight who served the lady of his love as truly and humbly as any knight could. He dared not tell her of his love, however, for she was not only fair but of the highest rank in the land. At last the lady herself took pity on him and agreed to take him for her husband. Solemnly they plighted their troth. The knight swore that never, on his honour as a knight, would he assert his lordship over her. He would keep it in name only to save his

dignity. The lady in her turn thanked him humbly, and promised to be his true and faithful wife all her life long, and never to stir up strife between them. Thus they made agreement together. And, sirs, of

THE FRANKLIN
(*From the Ellesmere MS.*)

this one thing I am sure, that if love is to abide between two persons both must be free; for love which is forced and constrained soon dies, yet by patience and humility we can achieve what force never could attain. So these two accorded well together, each serving the other in all love and humility.

Two years they dwelt thus together, till the knight,

whose name was Averagus, took ship and sailed to England to win fame in adventures there. Meanwhile his wife Dorigen made doleful lament, weeping and wailing, as noble wives do when their husbands leave them. Her friends gathered about her and tried—now by this means, now by that—to cheer her. By degrees they won her so far that she consented to walk with them by the seaside. But, as soon as she saw all the black rocks which lined the shore, grief descended on her anew. "Eternal God," she cried, "who didst make all the world and create each thing for some good, madest Thou these rocks only to destroy man, the creature made in Thine own image? How many goodly seamen have perished on these crags! Could but these rocks be driven down to Hell then might my heart rest, and I need fear nought for my husband when he sails home again." In this way she lamented till her friends, seeing that her grief grew no less but rather greater by the seaside, led her inland to fair gardens and pleasant places.

It happened that on the 6th of May they were all gathered in a garden. Every leaf and flower shone in the sunlight, washed freshly by gentle showers. It seemed a veritable paradise for its beauty and sweet-scented flowers. No one, unless sickness or great sorrow weighed him down, could be sad on such a day. Dorigen alone did not join in the merry-making. Among the others danced a Squire Aurelius, as gay and fresh as is the month of May; nor were

his virtue and wealth less than his beauty and the good estimation in which he was held. Yet, unhappily, for these two years he had loved Dorigen with all his might, but had not dared to tell her of his love. To allay his grief he had written verses in which he lamented his lady's hard heart and his own sad plight in that he dared not speak but must die, even as Echo of her love for Narcissus.

On the day of which I speak it chanced that they two fell talking, and when Aurelius saw his time, "Madam," said he, "'tis in your power to save me or to slay me, for I love you better than any woman alive. If you will not love me then I must die, for without you life is all pain and woe." When she heard this she answered, "Is this what you meant, Aurelius, by those sad looks of yours? Never before could I guess. But your sighs are all in vain. I love my husband, and never shall I love another man in my life." So much she said, and then in jest she added, "Yet on my honour, there is one way for you to win my love. Go, sink all the black rocks that fringe this coast deep beneath the sea. If you do this, then I may be your love." At this cruel answer Aurelius went home in deep grief and cast him down and wept till the glorious sun had set in gloom, and hid his face beneath the dusky west—(for, gentles, this is how the poets say that night has fallen!).

Then all beside himself with grief, he prayed first to Phœbus that he would help him, and then

to Phœbus' sister the moon. "Lady that rulest the tides of the sea," he pleaded, "do now this favour for me. When next thou art at the full, check thy course a little, and travel no faster than thy brother, the sun. Then shalt thou stay ever at the full and ever shall there be high tide on this coast. Thus do thou for two years, and I can show my lady that not a rock is to be seen." He was still praying madly in this wise when his brother came and found him, and bore him to bed. Soon after this, Knight Averagus came home covered with glory, to find his faithful wife Dorigen awaiting him with joy.

For two years more Aurelius lay in torment on his bed of sickness. His only comfort was his brother, who tended him as well as he could and devised all manner of means to rid him of his pain. At last he remembered how, when he was a student at Orleans, he one day saw a fellow-student reading secretly a book of magic. This book spoke of the eight-and-twenty mansions of the moon, and much other such folly that we do not waste our time on nowadays, for Holy Church keeps us clear of such delusions. When he remembered this his heart was filled with joy, and he was sure that by some such means he would be able to work his brother's cure. "Why," he thought, "conjurers can make all manner of strange sights appear in a hall. They can bring in barges and water and lions and make grape-vines spring up, and all this is but seeming, there is no reality

behind it. If at Orleans I found some of my old companions, they might in the same way make all the rocks appear to be gone, and then my brother could claim his lady."

Straightway he went to his brother and unfolded his plan. Up rose Aurelius in all haste from his bed, and together they set off for Orleans. When they were still about a quarter of a mile from the town they met a young scholar wandering by himself. He greeted them in Latin and then told them that he already knew of their coming. They went with him to his house, where they were received with wonderful entertainment. First they saw a park full of deer and hunters killing the beasts. Then they saw men out hawking, and knights jousting on a plain, and last Aurelius saw his lady at a dance and he himself with her, holding her hand. Yet all the while they three sat alone in the scholar's study among his books and none came in to them.

After this they feasted and received good entertainment, nor were they long in coming to an agreement. The student promised that for a thousand pounds he would make all the rocks disappear. Aurelius would have given the whole world if he might have had hope of his lady's love, so he willingly promised to pay this fee. Back they all three journeyed together to Brittany. It fell out that they came in the cold frosty days of December when the sun grows tired and weak amid the frosts and sleet and rain. Forthwith the scholar began his magic with centres and

arguments and proportionals and other such paraphernalia of astrology about which I know nothing. At last all was ready and duly calculated, when lo! the rocks all disappeared, not one was to be seen.

As soon as Aurelius saw this miracle he went at once and sought till he found his mistress in Diana's temple, and falling before her on his knees, said, "Lady, I love you now as well as ever, and would be your true love or die of longing. For your honour's sake do you have pity on me, for as you desired so have I done, and every rock has gone from this coast." Aghast was Dorigen at this news and pale she stood as she were like to faint, for never had she thought to be caught in such a trap as this. Home she went, and for long it seemed that all she could do would be to die by her own hand, for never would she give her love to any man but her husband. For two days thus she made her moan, purposing to die, and none knew of her sad plight, her husband being away from the town, as it chanced, on his knightly business.

On the third day Averagus came to his home and found his wife pale with weeping. "What ails you, wife," he said, "that you weep thus?" At his question her tears fell faster than ever. "Alas!" she said, "that ever I was born. I have given my word and have promised a thing which is like to ruin us both"—and then she told him all the tale I have told you.

Her husband looked very sad, but at the last he said, "If your promise be given, wife, and your troth

plighted, then must you be his love. Grieved as I am, I would rather lose you than that, for my sake, you should break your oath." At this he called a squire and bade him escort Dorigen to a certain place, but he told him not the reason of her going.

So Dorigen set forth and on the way she met with Aurelius. "Where goest thou, lady?" he asked. "To meet you," she answered, half mad with grief. "My husband has sent me so that I may not break my plighted word." At this Aurelius' heart was filled with pity. He saw how sad she looked and was at once filled with admiration for the noble knight who would give up his greatest joy so that his wife might keep her promise. "Nay, lady," he said at length. "Freely your husband sent you, freely I send you back to him, nor from this day forth will I strive to stir up strife between you twain." Dorigen went back glad to her husband and told him what had passed, nor shall I stay to tell you of their great joy and contentment, nor how happy they lived till their lives' end.

Poor Aurelius took his way home sad at heart. Now his promise of a thousand pounds to the scholar began to weigh on his mind. "Truly," he thought, "if I pay him all I must sell my inheritance, shame my family, and go forth a beggar from my native town. Perhaps he may pity me and let me pay by degrees in a year or two."

From his chest he took five hundred pounds in gold, and went and sought the scholar to make his

request. "Have I kept full faith with you?" asked the scholar. "Yea, truly," said Aurelius. "Then have you won the love of your lady?" Aurelius told him "No," and recounted all the story I have told you here. "Then," said the scholar, "nobly the knight acted to you and nobly you acted in your turn. I too will be as generous as I may. Put up your money, sir squire, I will require nought of you. You are free of debt to me—so fare you well."

Lords, this is my tale, and at the end I ask you this question: "Who of all three was the noblest man and did the greatest act of generosity?"

* * * * *

"Well spoken, Franklin," said the Knight. "It would be hard, I trow, for any man fairly to judge whose conduct showed the best. They were honourable all three, and worthy of great praise! Who tells the next tale, Sir Host?" "That shall the Nun do, if she is willing," answered Harry Bailey; "for her lady the Prioress charmed us with her tale of the little martyr. That story will long stay in my memory. Now, madam, if you please, begin. We wait to hear your tale."

In serious tones the Nun began thus:

"Of all sins there is, if I may so describe it, one foster-mother, and that is idleness. If we but keep our hands and minds engaged in some virtuous occupation, we may avoid the snares of the Devil and walk in righteousness. For this reason I have

devoted some of my leisure to a work which I esteem suitable to my calling and in conformity with my vows, the translation of the life of St. Cecilia. My translation is in verse. I will recite it to you if I may."

Invocation to Mary

O Mary maiden, Christé's Mother free,
Fair flower of womanhood, fountain of grace,
Look down upon us. Come and hallow me
Thy humble slave, who worship in this place.
Through thee did God intend mankind to save,
Through thee, and through thy stainless purity
God's Son has rent the tomb, and burst the grave
For those that worship thee in sanctity.
O Mary Mother, for thine own true love,
And for the love thy Child to mankind bore,
And by the Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
And by the saints that tread the golden floor,
Give me thy grace, and mercy to increase
In all good works until my life shall cease.

The Interpretation of the Name Cecilia which Brother Jacob gives in the "Golden Legend"

Of St. Cecilia will I now the name,
Ere I my story tell, the sense expound.
In English, "heaven's lily" we may claim
The true equivalent, for in her abound,
As in a lily flower, the white of grace,

The green of conscience, and the savour sweet
Of holiness. Yet in another place
"Wanting in blindness" they the same repeat.
Or yet another meaning they discern,
And "heaven of peoples" is the sense they find—
Since, as towards the stars poor travellers turn
For guidance, so towards her turns mankind.

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

The Tale of the Life of St. Cecilia

From childhood was this maiden fair and bright,
In all the love of Christ instructed well,
And lived in holiness in Heaven's sight,
Till as she grew in age it now befell
That she must wed as other maidens use,
Nor might she through unwillingness refuse.

But God's high purpose had she to fulfil;
Through her and her sweet teaching was her mate,
Valerian, to knowledge brought, until
Baptised by holy Urban, recreate
Through Heaven's grace, he power had to see
A holy angel, sent by Heaven's decree.

The angel stood arrayed in shining light,
Bearing two wreaths, of rose and lilies made,
And said, "Though these are hid from all men's sight,
Yet on your heads these flowers shall never fade,

But shed their savour round you every hour.
Decay and death shall o'er them have no power."

Next, to their faith, Tiberius they won,
Valerian's brother, dearest to his heart.
In him also the works of faith were done,
Nor need they ever more asunder part,
But all the three, their minds and souls address
To do God's will in joyful business.

Not long from martyrs is the tyrant's hand
Withheld, not long in peace may virtue bide,
For false Almachius with an arméd band
Had seized the brothers, dragged them to his side
That they might incense burn to idols there,
Or else their lives he swore he would not spare.

But never, though the torturers them sought
To move by pains, their God would they deny,
But kneeled them down beneath the axe's stroke,
Glad for the Lord and for His truth to die.
Their death, to Life, one of their jailers won,
And he in turn received the martyr's crown.

Cecilia buried them with tranquil joy
That they so fair an end of life had won,
And she herself in virtuous employ,
In trust of God and of His risen Son,
Worked ever, till the tyrant her also
Had seizéd for to deal her pain and woe.

Boldly she stood before the judgment seat,
And boldly answered for her faith full free;
With nought of mercy hoped she then to meet,
Never to idols would she bow the knee.
Her at the last Almachius doomed to die
By torture, for she dared his power defy.

They placed her in a bath of boiling heat,
But cold and calm she sat amid the flame,
And never let she fall a drop of sweat,
But preached for ever Christé's holy name,
Until the tyrant foul that wished her dead,
Commanded them straightway smite off her head.

The cruel executioner with his knife
Twice tried in vain her slender neck to sever,
But all for nought, she could not lose her life.
Still crying on the Son of God for ever,
Three days she lived in torment and in pain,
But taught men still, their souls for Christ to gain.

Now at the last has God's bright angel come,
And borne her soul to heavenly bliss above.
Unto His Church she gave her earthly home
With all her wealth, in token of her love.
As she a saint is, so God grant that we
By her ensample pure and good may be. Amen.

When the Nun had ended her life of St. Cecilia, and we had ridden on a few miles and were just at Boughton-under-Blee, a man began to overtake us.

He was dressed in black with a white surplice underneath. His horse was grey and so flecked with foam that he seemed to have galloped several miles. His yeoman followed, whose horse was in little better condition. Across his saddle he had a pack thrown, but it seemed to contain little. For a long time I could not make out who the stranger was, but at last I decided from the style of his dress that he must be a canon. His hat hung down his back on a cord, for he had been riding fast, and over his head as a protection from the sun was a dock-leaf. In spite of this the sweat poured off his forehead in huge drops. As he came near, "Good day to you all, sirs," he cried. "I have hurried so because I wished to join you." His yeoman added, "I saw you start this morning from your inn and told my master, and he is eager to join you, for he loves merry-making." The Host was willing enough that he should join us. "For doubtless your master is a merry fellow too, and can tell us a tale or so," he said. "Who? My master? I can warrant he will do that," replied the yeoman, "and let me tell you he is a wonderful man." "What!" said the Host, "is he a scholar?" "Far greater than a scholar," replied the servant; "he has a wondrous power. Why, he could turn the whole ground from here to Canterbury to solid gold!" "Good heavens!" returned the Host, "you don't say that? Then why on earth does he hide his light under a bushel like this and go about practically in rags? I should have expected such a man to have

at least a decent coat on his back." "Ah," said the yeoman, "if you ask that question I will tell you a secret. My master is wise: of that there is no doubt; but anything carried to excess, as philosophers say, is a vice, and in him wisdom has led to folly." "Where do you live?" asked the Host. "In the suburbs of a town—among the haunts of thieves and malefactors generally." "What gives your face that strange sallow colour?" asked the Host. "It is bending over the fire and blowing it. All day long we are at our work, puffing and blowing, stoking and raking, and as reward of it all—nothing! We cozen men of their gold in pretence that we can make one pound into two, and we always fail." All this while the canon had been edging up to his servant to hear what he was saying, for like all men with guilty consciences he was always afraid of being talked about. He now told him to be silent. The Host was too interested to have the talk cut short. "Go on," said he, "take no notice of him." "No more I will," said the yeoman. When the canon saw that his servant was going to disclose his secrets, in very shame he turned and rode away.

"Now," said the yeoman, "I can speak plainly. The fiend take him, and him who first introduced me to him! Such a life have I led with him. For seven years I have dwelt with this canon and I am no whit the nearer to approving his science. For when I first came I was a bit of a dandy about my clothes, and now look at me, I might wear a stocking

on my head instead of a cap—and all my complexion is spoilt with puffing away at his fire. The heat has spoilt my eyesight, and what reward have I?—A heap of debts I shall never get quit of this side the grave. I will tell you what we do—and it is a craft in which the Devil has some share, and the elves more. This is the sort of recipe we use: 'Take five or six ounces of silver, with piment,[1] bone ash, and iron filings and grind these into fine powder. Put all together in an earthen pot, add salt and pepper, cover with a lid and cement with clay to make all air-tight.' Then, this is what happens. I blow the fire, and suddenly, bang! the whole thing explodes. 'Now how did that happen?' everyone asks. The first says it was too long on the fire, and the next that the pot was badly made (then I tremble, because that is my job), and another that the real fault lay with the fire because it was oak wood and not beech, and so the talk goes on till my master quiets them. 'We must take greater precautions next time. These misfortunes *will* occur in the present state of our knowledge. Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk. Let us sweep the floor and see if we can recover any of the ingredients, and then we will make another attempt.'

"Such is the charm of the study. Hope springs continually and failure only means fresh efforts. We would sell the coats off our backs for the means to carry our work further. The philosopher's stone dances ever before our eyes, and in rags and with the smell

[1] Trisulphite of arsenic.

of brimstone about us, we, its devotees, pursue it. In truth an alchemist has the odour of his work so strong upon him that you could recognise his calling a mile off. But it is time I began my tale, and remember, friends, that in alchemy as elsewhere all that glitters is not gold."

THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE OF A CUNNING ALCHEMIST

In a certain town there lived a canon, a man of religion by profession, but in reality so full of iniquity that he could corrupt a whole country-side. In this tale, I will tell you the way in which he beguiled an honest man, for if I were to tell of all his victims my tongue would fail me with the telling. But I beg you, friends, not to misunderstand the drift of my story. I am not out to slander any type of religion; quite the contrary. I wish rather, by showing to what lengths wicked men will go, to put you on your guard to distinguish the knaves from the truly virtuous, lest, if you are deceived by the former, you may unjustly throw some of the blame on the latter. But to my story.

In the same town there dwelt a priest, a man of quiet and virtuous habits, well beloved, and rich enough through the generosity of his landlady, who never suffered him to pay a penny for food or lodging,

she loved him so well. One day the canon came to him and begged a loan. "On the third day," he said, "I will return it you, or you may get me hanged as a thief." The priest gave him what he asked readily enough, and punctually on the third day the canon repaid the loan in full. "Truly," said the priest, "thou art an honest man. I should never fear to lend thee whatsoever thou mightest ask." The canon replied, "Honest have I ever been, and honest I hope I may remain till my dying day. In return for your help and kindness I would make you a small recompense. There is an art which I have deeply studied and in which I have attained to some small skill. If you wish, you too shall know somewhat of my philosophy. Say, have you any quicksilver here, or if not, will you send your man for some? Three ounces we shall need, and you shall see what I can effect with them."

Off went the servant full speed and brought back his three ounces of mercury. At once the canon set about his trickery. He drew out a crucible from his gown, put in an ounce of the mercury and set it on the fire. "Now," he said, "I have here a powder that I purchased at a great price. Its virtues are wonderful, for it will turn any metal into silver! Lo! I scatter some in the crucible. Now for the rest, it shall be your part: arrange the logs around the pot and blow the fire. Another time you will understand the ritual." Thus did that crafty canon, that limb of wickedness, beguile the priest. To those

who knew him not he seemed a friend, those who had tried him knew him for the fiend he was. I can scarce bring myself to tell the story of his tricks and wickedness.

While the priest toiled blowing the fire, the sweat running down his face with the heat, the wily canon drew out of his store a piece of beech wood. In it he had made a cavity and inserted just an ounce of silver shavings and stopped up the hole with wax. Now understand, friends, here and hereafter, that with foresight of what he meant to do, he had prepared all his cunning tricks and appliances. Then with feigned solicitude, "Sir priest," he said, "right well have you toiled, but still the fire burns not quite right as yet. Let me try what I can do. Wipe your face and rest you." The priest was only too glad of a rest, and while he wiped his face the canon stirred the fire and placed his piece of wood fairly over the mouth of the crucible. Then as soon as the wood grew hot the wax melted—as needs it must—and the silver fell down into the vessel. "That is right now," said he; "let us rejoice and take a drink, for all shall now be well."

The priest was delighted, good innocent man, suspecting nothing of the craft that was practised against him. At length the canon said, "Come, let us go out to get some clay, with which to make a mould for our metal, and a bowl of water. I will go with you, for I would not like you to think that I had played any tricks with this wonderful art." They fetched the

water and clay, the canon fashioned the mould, poured in the metal and cast it into the water to cool.

Now what had really happened was this. When mercury is heated in a crucible—as perhaps all you gentlemen know, though in case you do not I must tell you to make my story plain—it changes into a vapour like steam and disappears, but silver only melts and does not change otherwise. So when the canon poured out the contents of the crucible into the mould, there was the silver all liquid and ready, but the mercury was gone. Therefore in the cold water the liquid silver changed into a lump and was there for the priest to find, but the mercury had disappeared. The canon knew all about this, but the priest understood nothing and was just watching in wonder. "Now, sir priest," said the canon, "put in your hand and see what you can find." The priest put in his hand and drew out the lump of shining silver. "Ah," said the canon, "let us make trial yet again. Once is scarce a complete proof, and I should like you to understand this art thoroughly before we part."

They took another ounce of the quicksilver and put it in the crucible. The canon put in the powder and arranged the fire, but this time he had his silver shavings hidden in a long cane of which the end was stopped with wax as before. He made pretence to stir the fire. "It burns not as brightly as it should," he said, "but I will make the flames leap up." And so, as he poked it, he melted the wax and let the silver

fall into the crucible. Once more they poured the metal into the mould and again the priest drew out a lump of silver. "Yet a third time we will try," said the canon, "and this time we will not use quicksilver but copper. Send your servant for an ounce of it."

Again they heated the crucible, but this time the crafty canon had a different trick. He knew that the copper would not change as the quicksilver had done, but would melt and remain in the crucible. Therefore he did not put the silver into the crucible along with the copper, for he knew they would mix together. Instead he emptied the contents of the crucible into the mould and put it into the water to cool. Then he had to find some way of changing the lump of copper for one of silver. This is what that crafty man did. When the mould and the metal were in the water he plunged in his hand. From his sleeve he drew a lump of silver—just an ounce in weight—and quickly taking up the copper put the silver in its place. "Come," he said to the priest, "and help me. Put in your hand and see what you can find." The priest put in his hand and again found the lump of silver. "Ah!" said the canon. "We have had success indeed. Let us go to the goldsmith and find if it be true silver or not." The goldsmith hammered the metal and put it in the fire, and every way it proved silver, good and true.

Who could be more delighted now than the priest? "Dear, noble friend," he said to the canon, "for what price will you part with that powder which has

worked such miracles for us to-day? I would sell all I have to purchase it, so great are its powers." "Truly," answered the canon, "it is dear to buy. Except myself and one hermit there is no man in England who knows the secret." The priest pressed him. "Do not fear, name any price you please. However high it may be I will pay it gladly." "You have stood my friend, and therefore to you I will sell it for £40," he said. "But be sure you keep the matter a secret, men are so jealous of knowledge nowadays." The priest made no demur, paid the money and took the powder. From that day on he never saw the canon again, and whenever he made trial of the powder his experiments failed.

Such was the dastard's trick that the false canon played on the priest, and look you well, sirs, there are many like him, though none I hope quite so wicked. To my mind there is something contrary to God's will in such studies as these. Even the greatest philosophers of old would not disclose the secret. Hear this tale of Plato taken from an old book I once read. A disciple came to him asking the name of the philosopher's stone. Said Plato, "It is called Magnesia." "But that," replied the other, "is to explain one mystery by another yet greater. Tell me, what is 'Magnesia'?" 'It is a water made of elements four," replied the master. "And what may these four be?" "Ah!" said Plato. "That may I not tell. All we philosophers were sworn to reveal it to no man, for God was jealous lest man should

have this knowledge unless it pleased Him to reveal it Himself." So, friends, if it be God's will that the secret be kept, it is folly in men to strive against God. Let the matter rest, and God bless all good men. Amen.

* * * * *

As the canon's yeoman finished his tale of the false alchemist we entered a little town, Bob-up-and-down, on the Canterbury high-road. Our Host began at once to joke at the expense of the Cook, who was lagging behind the party, half asleep on his horse. "Wake him, somebody," he said. "See how he sleeps! He'll fall into the mud in a moment! Wake him, and to punish him we'll make him tell an extra tale. Rouse yourself, Cook—were you awake all last night or are you drunk?"

The Cook answered thickly, "Sir Host, I do not know why, but my head feels so heavy that I'd rather go to sleep than be given a gallon of the best ale in Eastcheap!" At that the Steward spoke up, "Well, Sir Host, if it will help the Cook, I'll tell a tale now and so let him off his task. Look at him—he's either ill or very drunk! Just see how his head wags!" He and the others laughed. The Cook was angry. He glared at the Steward and tried to answer but could not, and in his excitement he fell from his horse.

There he lay, stretched on the dirty road, and we had much ado to lift him up to the saddle again.

"You've no right to make game of a man in that way, sir," said Harry Bailey to the Steward. "You might need *his* help one day." "I meant no harm," answered the Steward. "See here, in token of fellowship let him drink my health and restore himself with this wine which I have in a gourd." The Steward handed this to the Cook, who at once put it to his lips and emptied it at one draught. We all laughed at this eagerness, and at the sudden change which came over him. He was now all smiles and friendliness. "Praised be Bacchus," said the Host. "How quickly quarrels are forgotten when wine appears! But come, Sir Steward, you offered to tell your tale. Begin now, and let us hear!"

Then the Steward told his tale of how the crow became black and acquired his hoarse rough voice. The bird once belonged to Phœbus and was snow-white, and could sing as sweetly as a nightingale. It could talk too, as wily parrots and jackdaws can now. But one day it told Phœbus a very unpleasant scandal, and in anger he tore out all its white feathers and cast a spell over it, so that when its feathers grew again they were black as pitch, and all the bird could say, from that day forward, was "Caw—Caw" in an ugly grating voice. "Good people," concluded the Steward, "take warning from the fate of the crow, and never spread evil tales, or scandalous gossip. If you do, people will dislike you and your voice as much as they dislike the crow!"

* * * * *

By the time the Steward had finished his tale the sun was not more than twenty-nine degrees above the horizon. My shadow was eleven feet long, so, considering the season of the year, the time would be about four o'clock. It happened too that we were just drawing near the outskirts of a town. At this our Host said, "We have heard tales from all save one—and that one is you, Sir Parson or Vicar. Come, whichever you are, and tell us your tale, for I should not like this game to be spoilt now at the very end."

The Parish Priest gave him a serious answer. "I will tell you no idle tales. Does not St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy warn us to leave fiction and stand firm in the truth? When I might sow good seed in your hearts, shall I waste the opportunity and scatter tares? Nay, if you are ready to hear a virtuous discourse I am ready to begin. But let me warn you I am no Norseman to tell you runes all alliteration like 'rum, ram, ruff,' nor will I speak in rhyme, for I hold it as great folly as the other. My tale shall be in sober prose—and remember that I am no great scholar and my speech is ever subject to the correction of one who is wiser than I." We all desired him to say whatever he thought, since we felt it would be well to end with a homily, that we might enter Canterbury in grave religious mood. So the Host bade him begin and we composed ourselves to listen.

THE PARSON'S HOMILY ON PENITENCE

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.—*Jer. vi.*

1. Our sweet Lord, God of Heaven, in His desire that no man should perish, but that we should all come to knowledge of Him and attain to life everlasting, admonished us by the mouth of His prophet Jeremiah and warned us saying, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths" (that means for the wisdom of men of old days), "where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Many are the spiritual paths that lead men to knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and His glory, but among them is one which faileth not to lead aright all men and women to the heavenly Jerusalem, even though they had before gone astray. This way is named Penitence, and whoso walketh in it, even though he have sinned many times and sore, still may hope for God's grace and forgiveness.

2. What then is Penitence? St. Ambrose says, "Penitence is the lamentation that a man makes for his sins that are past and his resolution to sin no more." Note here that there are two parts to Penitence. Penitence is not merely the lamentation of sins that are past, for that, though necessary for full salvation, is of little avail if a man fall at once to the same or similar sins. Man must lament his

past sins; but he must also resolve not to sin again, for, though we have the comfortable assurance of the Gospel that Christ through His great mercy can save the sinner who falls many times into sin, yet for him who sins not, but by Penitence keeps in the path of righteousness, salvation is more certain. Of all that should persuade us to Penitence, fear of the horrible pains of Hell is the strongest motive.

3. Of Penitence there are three species. The first is solemn; the second, common; the third, private. Of solemn penances there are two sorts: the first is to be excommunicated by Holy Church in Lent—as is done for the murder of a child or some such horrible offence; the second occurs when the sin to be expiated was openly done and a matter of public talk. Then the Church decrees a public penance. Common penance is that which priests regularly enjoin in certain cases, as for example to go on pilgrimages barefoot. Private penance is what we do daily for the sins which we confess privately and receive private absolution.

4. We may liken Penitence to a tree, of which the root is Contrition and hideth in the heart. From this root springs a stalk that beareth branches and leaves of Confession and fruit of Satisfaction. This is what Christ meant when in His gospel He said, "Bring forth worthy fruit of Penitence," and to this too He referred when He said, "By their fruits shall ye know them," for as the root is hidden in the heart so by its fruits alone may you judge of true Penitence

If in truth we bring forth worthy fruits of Penitence, alms, and prayers, and bodily pain, whether it be by watching, or fasting, or scourging, or the wearing of hair garments, borne in cheerfulness—if as I say in this life we bring forth noble fruits of Penitence, then we may look for our reward in the life to come, even eternal bliss in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. There shall be no sorrow nor sighing, for the Lord shall wipe all tears away. On earth have the righteous sorrow; in Heaven are all at peace. Whereas on earth the body is dark and full of sin, there is it clear as the sun and clad in shining raiment; here are we sick and weak and mortal, there shall we be strong and enjoy the life immortal. There is no hunger nor thirst, for the grace of God feedeth them; and if we would attain to this blissful life, then must we here below prepare ourselves by humility of life and mortification of the flesh, and so win to rest through toil; to plenty of joy, by hunger and thirst; and eternal life, by death and the mortification of sin.

* * * * *

As the Parson's droning voice ceased, the sun was setting and we saw the two tall towers of Canterbury Cathedral flushed with red-gold light. We rode on silently. Peace hung in the blue-grey mists over the valleys of the country-side, and calm joy entered our hearts as we beheld the goal of our journey and the end of all our pilgrimage. Slowly we entered the

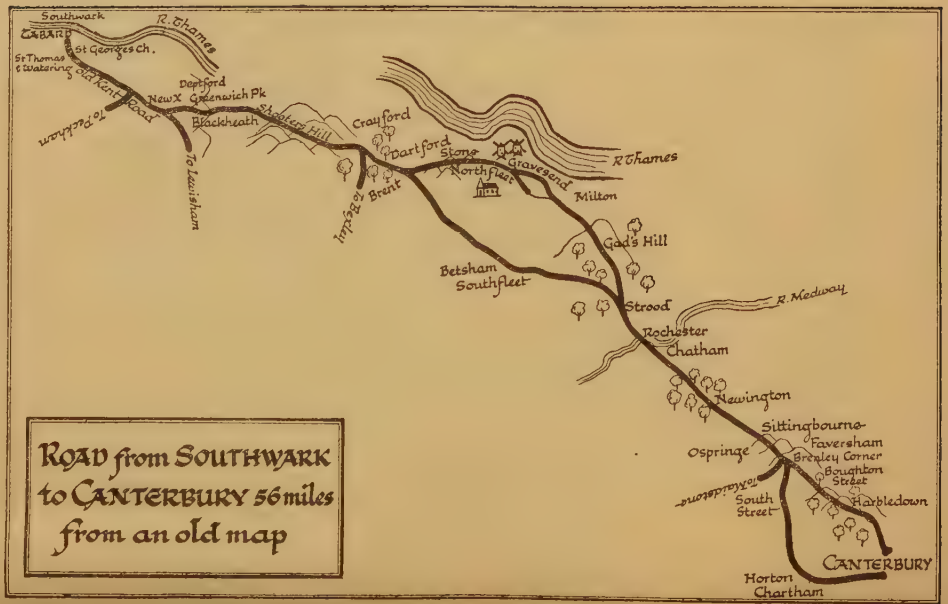
CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

tall gates in the wall, solemnly we dismounted and retired to rest at the inn in the city square, prepared to do penance on the morrow at the shrine we had come so far to seek.

THE AUTHOR TAKES LEAVE OF HIS READERS

I pray all those that read this little book that for all that pleases them therein they thank our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom proceedeth all goodness. If there be anything that displeases them, I pray them lay the blame therefor on my ignorance, for had I the knowledge I would willingly have done better.

Also, I humbly beseech you all that you pray for me, asking Christ to have mercy on my soul and to forgive me my sins, especially the writing of the many worldly books and love-lays that I made in thoughtless mood. But for my legends of saints, homilies and moral books, I thank our Lord Jesus Christ, His Holy Mother and all the saints of Heaven, beseeching them to give me grace to repent truly and bring forth the fruits of confession and satisfaction, so that by the great mercy of Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, I may at the last dread judgment be among them that shall be saved. Amen.



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